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**ALTERITY, COLONIALITY AND MODERNITY
IN ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE
FIRST THREE GENERATIONS OF 20TH
CENTURY AMHARIC-LANGUAGE
INTELLECTUALS**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2015

Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies
SOAS, University of London

Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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Date: 14/09/2015

Abstract

This thesis investigates the political thought of the first three generations of 20th century Ethiopian intellectuals. It focuses on Amharic-speaking scholars, journalists and fiction writers close to the centre of the Ethiopian state and active between the 1900s and the early 1970s. The political thought of the intellectuals under consideration moved mostly within the confines of the dominant imperial discourse promoted by successive Ethiopian monarchs, called Grand Narrative in the thesis. The Grand Narrative, I argue, is characterised by a particular conception of alterity and coloniality. In the Grand Narrative, alterity is perceived as a threat to negate, eliminate or assimilate. Similarly, the Grand Narrative attempts to minimise, if not entirely suppress, Ethiopia's relation with colonialism. It is through the lens of alterity and coloniality that the thesis analyses the key ideological debate of 20th century Ethiopian political thought, that on modernity and modernisation. In contrast with the widespread historiographical tendency to describe Ethiopian political thought through Western concepts such as 'liberalism', 'progressivism' and 'conservatism', the thesis closely engages with local Amharic terminology. It explores how the notion of *zämänawinnät*, the Amharic word that usually translates 'modernity', was theorised in fictional and non-fictional works, classifying Ethiopian intellectuals based on their relationship with state-sponsored ideas of *zämänawinnät*. Present-day Ethiopian historians generally share a negative assessment of the way first-, second- and third-generation thinkers conceived modernity. Common argument of contemporary historiography is that the thinkers of the imperial period failed to theorise for Ethiopia a viable model of modernisation. The thesis investigates in what ways the notion of failure can be applied to first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals. The intellectuals' upholding of the Grand Narrative's *acoloniality* is identified as a central problematic point. At the same time, the thesis nuances the accusation of failure, arguing that first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals did participate, albeit only partially and hesitantly, to the *recolonisation* of the Grand Narrative in the 1960s, when oppositional historiographies proposed a more pluralistic and inclusive view of alterity and reconsidered the role played by colonialism in 19th and 20th century Ethiopian history.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	3
Table of contents.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	7
Note on translations	7
Calendar	8
Transliteration	8
Vowels	8
Consonants.....	8
Glossary	10
Key philosophical terms	11
Acronyms	12
Introduction.....	13
Ethiopia and intellectual history	13
Methodology I: Western philosophical traditions and Ethiopian political thought	21
Methodology II: Amharic literature in the history of Ethiopian political thought.....	26
Chapter 1 – Setting the scene.....	30
Historical background.....	30
Authors.....	38
Ethiopia’s ‘modern’ intellectuals	38
Four generations of intellectuals	41
The first generation	42
Transitional figures between the first and the second generation	42
The Italian occupation in the periodisation of Ethiopian intellectual history	43
The second generation	45
The third generation.....	54
The fourth generation.....	57
Texts.....	58
Ethiopian print culture	58
Amharic literature and didacticism	61
First, second and third-generation texts	65
Literary theory and the study of political thought.....	69
Chapter 2 – Philosophies of history: the Grand Narrative and its opponents	71
The dominance of one interpretative framework.....	71
The Grand Narrative	73
A state ideological project.....	73
Uninterrupted history, uninterrupted identities	78
Unicentrism and exceptionalism.....	82
Internal and external borders.....	84

Local scholarship and foreign scholarship	86
Teleology	88
The unity of the transcendental nation	89
Clashing historiographical narratives: contesting exceptionalism and borders	93
The role of the ‘colonial’ in Ethiopian historiography.....	97
Redefining the ‘colonial’	97
The ‘colonial’ in the Grand Narrative.....	99
Chapter 3 – Imperial political thought	101
The Grand Narrative and the challenges of the 20 th century.....	101
Defining <i>zāmānawinnāt</i>	102
A traditional conception of modernity	109
Pro- <i>zāmānawinnāt</i> and anti- <i>zāmānawinnāt</i> intellectuals.....	112
The lag	114
Mimicry or creative incorporation?	118
Supermarket sociology.....	121
Defending the monarchy and the ‘benevolent hierarchy’	125
The Japanisers.....	131
A flawed hybridisation.....	137
Cultural reductionism.....	143
Chapter 4 – The failure of pro- <i>zāmānawinnāt</i> intellectuals?	145
What went wrong? <i>Käšäfa</i> (‘failure’) in Ethiopian historiography	145
First, second and third generations: the positive assessments.....	147
First, second and third generations: the negative assessments.....	148
The ‘failure by education’ interpretation	151
The ‘failure by co-option’ interpretation	154
Täfäri’s rise to power (1916-1930).....	154
Täfäri and pro- <i>zāmānawinnāt</i> intellectuals in the pre-1936 period	156
The nature and role of censorship under Haylä Səlasse.....	158
Circumventing censorship.....	163
Dissent under Haylä Səlasse	167
The ‘failure by inertia’ interpretation.....	173
The criticism of the third generation by the fourth generation and foreign observers	174
The self-criticism of the third generation.....	179
‘Unable or unwilling’?	185
Reasons for failure: adherence to Grand Narrative and its acoloniality	186
Chapter 5 – The acolonial modernity of the Grand Narrative	188
Adwa.....	188
Nationalism and nationhood in the imperial period: Ethiopia’s internal border	190
Pre-1936.....	191
Post-1941	199
The relationship with colonised Africa: Ethiopia’s external border	207

Ethiopian intellectuals and European colonialism	207
Black nationalism and race	212
The Italian occupation.....	218
Ethiopia as the ‘smallest’ of the ‘big’ nations.....	227
Chapter 6 – Recolonising the Grand Narrative	229
The counter-historiographies emerge to the surface	229
Deconstructing the myth of Adwa	231
The national question	235
Africa back on the agenda.....	243
Reconsidering the Italian occupation	256
An agenda for the future	260
Conclusions.....	262
Appendix 1 – Bio-bibliographies.....	268
The first generation	268
Transitional figures between first and second generation.....	272
The second generation	274
The third generation	277
Appendix 2 – Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhän’s ‘Also of Etiopics’ (1965)	285
Figures	288
References.....	291
Primary sources.....	291
Newspapers	291
Works by Ethiopian intellectuals	291
Fictional	291
Non-fictional	295
Works by Europeans	296
Secondary sources.....	297
Published sources.....	297
Unpublished sources	340

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Note on translations

All translations from Italian, French and Amharic are mine, unless otherwise indicated. For the novels *Araya* and *Adäfräs*, I have sometimes used the translations of Kane (1975) and Molvaer (2008) as starting point for my own translation. Whenever a text was translated in English by the author himself I have quoted from the author's own English translation. This is the case for Mängəstu Lämma's two comedies *Ṭälfo Bäkise* and *Yalačča Gabəčča* and Kābbädä Mikael's trilingual *Ethiopia and Western civilisation*. In case of bilingual works such as Afäwärķ Gäbrä-Iyyäsus's *Guide du voyageur en Abyssinie* (French/Amharic), my English translation is based on the French version.

Calendar

All dates in the thesis are in the Gregorian calendar. The Ethiopian calendar is 8 year behind the Gregorian calendar from the 1st of January to the 11th of September, when the Ethiopian new year starts, and then 7 years behind the Gregorian calendar from the 11th of September to the 31st of December.

Transliteration

In the case of English-language publications by Ethiopian authors, the author's own transliteration of their own name has been used.

Vowels

1 st order	2 nd order	3 rd order	4 th order	5 th order	6 th order	7 th order
ተ = tä	ቲ = tu	ቲ = ti	ታ = ta	ቲ = te	ቲ = tə	ቲ = to

Consonants

Amharic has five explosive (also called glottalised or ejective) consonants, which have been transliterated with a dot below (ṭ - ṣ - ḵ - ṗ - ṣ̣).

Amharic symbol	Transliteration	Common alternative transliterations	Description	Pronunciation (examples)
ሀ, ሐ, ኀ	ha	--		Like <i>h</i> in English <i>hail</i>
ለ	lä	--		Like <i>l</i> in English <i>lion</i>
መ	mä	--		Like <i>m</i> in English <i>mother</i>
ሠ, ሰ	sä	--		Like <i>s</i> in English <i>sun, song</i>
ረ	rä	--		Like <i>r</i> in Italian/Spanish <i>rosa</i>
ሸ	šä	sh		Like <i>sh</i> in English <i>share</i>
ቀ	kä	q	Explosive <i>k</i>	--
በ	bä	--		Like <i>b</i> in English <i>boy</i>
ተ	tä	--		Like <i>t</i> in English <i>toy</i>
ቸ	čä	ch, tch		Like <i>ch</i> in English <i>chair</i>
ነ	nä	--		Like <i>n</i> in English <i>name</i>
ኘ	ñä	ny, gn, ñ		Like <i>ñ</i> in Spanish <i>piña</i> Like <i>gn</i> in Italian <i>gnocchi</i>
ከ	kä	--		Like <i>k</i> in English <i>key</i>
ወ	wä	--		Like <i>w</i> in English <i>water</i>
ዘ	zä	--		Like <i>z</i> in English <i>zone</i>
ዝ	žä	j		Like <i>j</i> in French <i>jeudi</i> Like <i>s</i> in English <i>leisure</i>
የ	yä	--		Like <i>y</i> in English <i>young, yes</i>
ደ	dä	--		Like <i>d</i> in English <i>dice</i>
ጀ	jä	ğ		Like <i>j</i> in English <i>joy</i>
ገ	gä	--		Like <i>g</i> in English <i>girl</i>
ጠ	ṭä	--	Explosive <i>t</i>	--
ጨ	čä	ch, tch	Explosive <i>č</i>	--
ጰ	pä	--	Explosive <i>p</i>	--
ጸ, ፀ	šä	ts, tz	Explosive <i>s</i>	Like <i>z</i> in Italian <i>ragazzo</i>
ፈ	fä	--		Like <i>f</i> in English <i>fox</i>
ፐ	pä	--		Like <i>p</i> in English <i>pear</i>

Glossary

Abba: father.

Abun: bishop, the highest ecclesiastical title of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church until the appointment of a patriarch in 1959; *abuna* when used with a proper noun, for example *Abuna Petros*.

Aläḳa: head of a church, learned priest.

Arbäñña: patriot, resistance fighter during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941).

Ato: equivalent of Mr.

Bäjerond: royal treasurer.

Barya: ‘slave’, generally with no ethnic connotations; it has the wider meaning of anyone who is of darker complexion (including highlanders).

Baša: derivative of the Turkish *pasha* for low-level government officials.

Blatta: a title generally signifying learning, given in the twentieth century to government officials of the director-general level or equivalent.

Blatten Geta: ‘master of the *blatta*’; given to government officials of the ministerial level.

Därg: ‘committee’, the military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987.

Däbtära: cleric, with attributes of learning, astrology and intrigue.

Däjazmač: ‘commander of the gate’, a politico-military title below *ras*.

Ətege: title designating the coronated spouse of an emperor.

Färänj: white foreigner.

Gäbbar: tribute-paying peasant.

Gəbi: courtyard, compound, generally with reference to royal or aristocratic palaces.

Habäša: self-designation predominantly used by Christian highlanders inhabiting the region between Asmara and Addis Abäba, i.e. mainly Amharic- and Tigrinya-speakers.

Fitawrari: ‘commander of the vanguard’, a title below *Däjazmač*.

Hakim: doctor.

Käntiba: mayor.

Ləjj: ‘child’, honorific title generally reserved for sons of the royal family or upper nobility.

Näggadras: ‘head of merchants’, chief government official in charge of the collection of customs.

Näftäñña: from *näft*, rifle; name given to Emperor Mənilək’s warriors of northern origin who later settled in the south.

Nəgus: king.

Nəgusä Nəgäst: ‘king of kings’, the official title of Ethiopian emperors.

Ras: ‘head’, highest politico-military title below *nəgus*.

Ras Bitwädäd: most favoured *ras*, often officiating in the name of the king.

Şəhəfe Təəzaz: head of the royal scribes, keeper of the royal seal. In the 20th century, title of the Minister of Pen.

Şənkəlla: the main connotation of the term is ‘black slave’; it was used to designate lowland populations at the margins of the Abyssinian kingdom, who were victims of slave raids and other predations from highlanders. The term implies physical/ethnic difference. It was never used as a self-designation and it is now considered derogatory. A synonym is *şəgole*.

Wäyzäro: equivalent of Mrs.

Wəşt arbäñña: undercover *arbäñña*.

Zämänä Məsəfənt: ‘the time of the nobility’, the Age of the Princes (1769-1855).

Key philosophical terms

Aəmro: intellect, intelligence.

Kəşəfa: failure.

Ləmat: development.

Səltane: civilisation.

Zämənawinnät: modernity.

Acronyms

AAU: Addis Ababa University

AOI: Africa Orientale Italiana (Italian East Africa)

ELF: Eritrean Liberation Front

EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front

EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

ESM: Ethiopian Student Movement

EWf: Ethiopia World Federation

HSIU: Haile Selassie I University

NUEUS: National Union of Ethiopian University Students

OAU: Organisation of African Unity

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front

TPLF: Tigrayan People's Liberation Front

UCAA: University College of Addis Ababa

USUAA: Union of the University Students in Addis Ababa

WSLF: Western Somali Liberation Front

Introduction

Ethiopia and intellectual history

‘The history of African political ideas is a neglected field of study’, complains Boele van Hensbroek at the beginning of his 1998 study on African political philosophy. Despite some groundbreaking works in the discipline¹, van Hensbroek argues, ‘within Africanist scholarship the African intellectual remains an anomaly’ (1998: 7). In 2003, Anthony Bogues similarly points out that ‘Africana political thought in the academy continues to be a marginalized subfield in the history of political thought and intellectual history’ (2003a: 146)². Guy Martin opens his 2012 monograph on African political thought by commenting that van Hensbroek’s considerations on the marginality of intellectual history within the Africanist tradition remain, fourteen years later, ‘a major understatement’ (Martin 2012: 1). Reviewing Martin’s book, Stephen Chan laments, once again, ‘how parlous writing on African political thought has been’ (2013: 203). ‘It is as if thought had been denied to Africa’, he adds, ‘and that struggles for liberation and development were inchoate and fortuitous—anything rather than thoughtful’ (Chan 2013: 203).

Van Hensbroek criticises two scholarly traditions in particular. Firstly, the tendency to study ‘traditional’ African political thought as an unconscious collective heritage shared by all members of a given community. The focus on ‘systems of thought’ was widespread in the early history of African philosophical studies, for example in the works of Alexis Kagame (1955), Placide Tempels (1959), Marcel Griaule (1965) and John Mbiti (1969). The Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (1970, 1976) coined the pejorative term ‘ethnophilosophy’ to refer to these types of scholarly analyses. Hountondji is critical of the way ethnophilosophers portray African philosophy and political thought as immutable, ahistorical, inert, equivalent to a pure pre-colonial essence, and incapable of change from within. He reacts against ‘the ideological conception that non-Western cultures are dead, petrified, reified, eternally self-replicating and lacking any internal capacity for negation or transcendence’ (1996 [1976]: 165). Ethnophilosophical works are, for him, particularly guilty of perpetuating the ‘myth of primitive unanimity’, based on the assumption that

in ‘primitive’ societies—that is to say, non-Western societies—everybody always agrees with everybody else. It follows that in such societies there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems of belief (1996 [1976]: 60).

¹ He references in particular July (1968), Geiss (1968), and Langley (1973).

² See also his volume *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (2003b).

Van Hensbroek agrees with Hountondji's warning that ethnophilosophy remains a 'permanent temptation of Africanist discourse' (Hountondji 1996 [1976]: vii)³. Alongside ethnophilosophy, van Hensbroek criticises a second scholarly tradition. When the shift moves away from collective and anonymous 'systems of thought', the propensity, he notices, is to equate political thought with the speeches and written works of a few statesmen, mostly as an attempt to better understand their policy choices when in power. Studies have therefore focused on individual political figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, with little attention to intellectuals not involved in the political profession, and few comparative analyses of transregional developments. Emma Hunter observes that 'if limited to longer texts written by known authors, we find ourselves with a very narrow view indeed of Africa's [...] intellectual history' (2015: 9). As a corrective, she proposes to 'turn instead to a wider corpus of texts, and to trace continuities and change in political languages within that corpus' (2015: 9). Working with wider corpora of texts 'enables us', she argues, 'to move beyond an intellectual history limited to elites' (Hunter 2015: 9).

The focus on great men and their writings led many historical studies to have an eminently descriptive and biographical character. Intellectual history is interpreted as a 'history of intellectuals' rather than a 'history of ideas'. Hunter advocates instead an approach based on 'individual words which travel the world and take on new meanings in different contexts' (2015: 9). This 'offers us a path towards elucidating vernacular understandings of fundamental political concepts' (2015: 9). The emphasis on vernaculars is particularly significant. Much intellectual history of Africa has only drawn from Europhone sources, further restricting the historiographical corpus. African-language materials have received a much more limited historiographical attention compared to European-language ones. Karin Barber's works (2006, 2007) have led to a new scholarly attention not only for Afrophone sources, but also for non-canonical texts such as personal diaries, letters, obituaries, and unpublished pamphlets and booklets, in what Hunter calls a 'textual turn' in African historical studies (2015: 28).

Within Ethiopian studies, political historiography has largely dominated over other kinds of historiography, including intellectual history. Scholars of Ethiopia have repeatedly complained about the lack of studies on the topic. In a 1990 survey of Ethiopian historiographical practice, Donald Crummey calls for 'an integrated account of Ethiopia's commercial and institutional development [...] illuminated by the perceptions of its own intellectuals' (1990: 111). A subsequent historiographical survey notes that intellectual history in Ethiopia 'has yet to be written' altogether (Bahru et al. 1994: 8). Again in 2010, Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis remarks that 'little work has been done in the area of Ethiopian intellectual history' and history of political thought (2010b: 8). Claude Sumner's studies on Ethiopian

³ For more detailed discussions on ethnophilosophy, see Masolo (1994: 46-67 and 84-102) and Oruka (1981).

philosophy (1974, 1976, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1999), as pioneering as they are in the field of Ethiopian and African philosophical studies, discuss ethics and moral philosophy more than political philosophy. Sumner's former student Teodros Kiros⁴ started working in the direction of political thought, and edited a volume on the theme to which both he and Sumner contributed chapters on Ethiopian philosophy (Teodros 2001). Sumner and Teodros pushed for a greater integration of Ethiopia in African philosophical studies and of African philosophy in Ethiopian studies – thus breaking the long-standing isolationism of Ethiopian studies, and reversing the general exclusion of Ethiopia from surveys of African political thought and African philosophy. The collaboration between the two Ethiopianists and prominent African philosophers such as Ali Mazrui, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Anthony Appiah and D. A. Masolo continued with another edited volume in 2004 (Teodros 2004a, Sumner 2004)⁵. Other prominent scholars of Ethiopian philosophy are Workineh Kelbessa⁶ and Bekele Gutema, who have edited respectively the first and the second volume of 'Ethiopian philosophical studies', a publication sponsored by the US-based Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (Workineh 2011, Bekele and Verharen 2013).

There are currently three different scholarly streams in the study of Ethiopian intellectual history. The first is represented by ethnophilosophy. Messay Kebede's work (1999, 2003b, 2008a) revolves around categories like 'Ethiopian spirit' and 'Ethiopian tradition', which are based on the unanimist and essentialised vision of culture typical of ethnophilosophy. Messay discusses the 'Ethiopian approach to nature' (1999: 190), the 'Ethiopian mentality' (1999: 191), the 'Ethiopian notion of time' (1999: 193), and the 'Ethiopians' understanding of fate' (1999: 199). In so doing, he presents identity as uniform, homogeneous, de-individualised. Ethnophilosophical is also Messay's tendency to compare the thought of individual European philosophers (Spinoza, Descartes, Hegel) with what 'the Ethiopians' (or in some cases 'Ethiopian intellectuals') as an undifferentiated whole think and believe (1999: 188-189), thus reproducing the idea that Western philosophy is the conscious undertaking of single intellectuals, while African philosophy consists in a collective and unconscious heritage. Ethiopia is described by Messay as mono-cultural, its customs and beliefs universally shared and signifying one and the same thing for all individual Ethiopians. Moving from similar theoretical premises, Mohammed Girma has recently continued the ethnophilosophical tradition in Ethiopian intellectual history (Mohammed 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014).

⁴ Teodros published on Ethiopian literature (2004b), on the philosophy of Zära Yaḳob (2005) and on what he calls 'Ethiopian discourse' (2010). He paid homage to Sumner's work in a 1996 article for *Northeast African Studies* (Teodros 1996).

⁵ The collection of essays includes an in-depth overview on post-independence African political philosophy by Olúfémí Táíwò (Táíwò 2004). A recent special issue of *African Identities* has also reengaged with African political thought as a field of study (El-Malik and Jones 2015).

⁶ See also his other works on Ethiopian philosophy, Workineh (1994) and (2002).

Contrary to ethnophilosophers' reliance on a small number of secondary sources, the second scholarly trend is based on meticulous and extensive archival research. Foremost scholar in the field is Bahru Zewde, whose pioneering contribution to Ethiopian intellectual history is hard to overemphasise. Preceded by a series of articles published over the years on specific aspects of Ethiopia's intellectual past⁷, Bahru's 2002 monograph on pre-1936 intellectuals has brought to light a wealth of information on the first, and partly second, generation of 20th century thinkers. Bahru's subsequent work on the fourth generation (2014), less groundbreaking than his first, is nevertheless an essential contribution to the history of the Ethiopian Student Movement. This thesis draws extensively from Bahru's scholarship. At the same time, Bahru's works share the biographical and descriptive character of other studies on African intellectual history. The lives of key thinkers are discussed in details, and the content of their works accurately described, but Bahru stops short of situating their ideas within a broader philosophical framework. Other significant contributions to Ethiopian intellectual history, such as J. Calvitt Clarke III's 2011 study on the Ethiopian Japanisers and Peter Garretson's 2012 biography of Wärkənäh Əšäte, similarly describe men and events rather than philosophy or political thought.

The third scholarly trend in Ethiopian intellectual history moves more decidedly towards a history of ideas. It builds upon the work of 'realist' historians like Bahru, but the perspective is analytical rather than descriptive. Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis criticises Bahru for his lack of engagement with key philosophical concepts, for example the concepts of 'modernity' and 'modernisation'. Bahru, Elizabeth argues, 'talked about Ethiopian modernization without tackling the concept of modernity as a philosophical construct of Occidental rationalism' (2010b: 8)⁸. The notions of 'modernity' and 'modernisation', central as they were in 20th century Ethiopian intellectual production, have attracted a high degree of scholarly attention. In his *Marxist modern: an ethnographic history of the Ethiopian revolution*, Donald Donham explores how Ethiopian intellectual elites reacted to what he calls 'metanarrative of modernity' (1999: 2). Elizabeth edited a volume titled *Perspectives on Ethiopian modernity* (2012), followed by a special issue of *Northeast African Studies* on the same theme (2013). Elizabeth's work (2010a, 2010b) has been a key reference point for this thesis, particularly in the way she links the genealogy of modernity in Ethiopian political philosophy with the concept and construction of alterity. Donald Crummey has also stressed how 'a critical appreciation of modernity in Ethiopia must be made against a background which historicizes the process whereby it came about' (2000: 23). His 2000 article urges a broader scholarly attention for issues of cultural epistemology which have underlain the relations between Ethiopia and Europe

⁷ Particularly important contributions are Bahru (1990), Bahru (1993) and Bahru (1994). All of them were republished, together with other articles, in a 2008 volume of Bahru's most important essays (Bahru 2008).

⁸ See her 2004 review of Bahru's 2002 *Pioneers of Change* (Elizabeth 2004).

in the late 19th and 20th century. On the relationship between European and Ethiopian philosophy, my methodology has been informed by Salvatore's in-depth analysis of the thought of Gäbrä-Həywät Baykādañ (Salvatore 2007 and 2009) and his arguments against the tendency to consider the 'African' and the 'Western' epistemological traditions as self-contained opposites. Maimire Mennasemay has produced a number of critical reflections on Ethiopian political theory, epistemology and history of knowledge production (2005, 2005-2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012). Lastly, James De Lorenzi has investigated the role of missionaries and mission schools in shaping local understandings of the 'modern' in Ethiopia and Eritrea (De Lorenzi 2013). His forthcoming monograph explores how Ethiopian and Eritrean thinkers used local traditions of historiography and travel writing to understand modernity and its challenges (De Lorenzi 2015)⁹.

This study analyses the political thought of the first three generations of 20th century Amharic-speaking intellectuals, covering roughly the period from the battle of Adwa in 1896 to the early 1970s. These intellectuals were all close to the centre of the imperial state in Addis Abāba, where all the major Ethiopian schools and cultural institutions were located. Although first- and second-generation intellectuals had high-profile political careers, the third generation worked in roles more typically associated with cultural production, such as theatre, teaching, or journalism. This thesis thus expands the traditional focus on heads of state and political leaders typical of existing scholarship on African political thought. Instead of just concentrating on the ruling stratum, my analysis includes cultural practitioners such as writers, broadcasters, journalists and playwrights that had limited political engagement. This is also a history of the centre of the Ethiopian state. All the sources this thesis draws from are in Amharic, and all the intellectuals considered are Amharic-speaking, Christian, male, close to Emperor Haylā Səlässe and, for the most part, solidly integrated in state structures or public institutions. They were not all ethnically Amhara, but were nevertheless all assimilated to the dominant Amhara culture, and, of all Ethiopian languages, they only wrote in Amharic. Their location at the centre of the Ethiopian state, in the hegemonic hub of knowledge production, allowed them to gain rapid public acclaim. They therefore detained a clear privilege over non-Amharic-speaking intellectuals, whose cultures and languages did not have the same recognition as Amharic, and whose location at the economic and political periphery of the Ethiopian state prevented them from gaining access to educational and cultural infrastructures. Because I do not read other Ethiopian languages except Amharic, this bias was, within the timeframe of this research work, partly inevitable. Further constraints make researching non-Amharic intellectual traditions challenging. A ban on non-Amharic publications was in place starting from the mid-1940s, and even before then publishing in non-Amharic languages, particularly Oromo, was greatly discouraged by Ethiopian authorities. There is a large corpus of oral texts in Amharic as well as

⁹ His previous works are also worth mentioning, De Lorenzi (2008a and 2008b).

non-Amharic languages that an Ethiopian intellectual history could draw from, but ‘a satisfactory, broadly applicable methodology of how to approach the oral heritage philosophically has [...] not yet been developed’ (Rettová 2007: 165). This thesis only focuses on written sources by named authors, for which a more established historiographical methodology exists. Writing is ‘no *conditio sine qua non* for a critical and reflective discourse, although it is a major advantage for its development’ (Rettová 2007: 41). From a methodological standpoint, written sources ‘have several qualities that oral literatures lack and that are helpful in [political] philosophy: writing itself; the connection to individual authors; and the minimum mediation through a researcher’ (Rettová 2007: 41).

The term ‘Ethiopian political thought’ is used in the thesis with no ambition to represent the whole of Ethiopia’s political thought. The thought of the authors under analysis is certainly ‘Ethiopian’, but ‘Ethiopian political thought’ encompasses many more intellectual traditions than the one the authors under analysis belonged to. The term ‘Ethiopia’ itself requires some specification. In keeping with a now-established historiographical tradition (e.g. Donham 1986), I have employed ‘Ethiopia’ in reference to the modern state forged by Emperor Mənilək II in the last part of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th. I have used the term ‘Abyssinia’ and ‘Abyssinian empire’, instead, to refer to the more ancient polity that existed in the northern highlands before Mənilək’s late 19th century state. The two terms, though, are variably used to refer interchangeably to the one or the other polity. Debates abound among scholars on the appropriate use of each designation, supported by studies on the historical variability of the two terms (Adhana 1994, Auf der Maur 2006, Belcher 2012: 19-20). In the context of this thesis, the semantic ambiguity remains, particularly when quoting from primary and secondary sources that use the terms in ways different than mine. As a last terminological note, the term ‘West’ has been used in the same acception in which it was used in Amharic writings. Ethiopian authors used it in a rather loose way, to refer to North America and Western Europe mostly, although references to Russia were also sometimes made.

This thesis is an intellectual history, therefore it does not offer a detailed account of political facts and policy choices, although they constitute the essential backdrop of my analysis. Chapter 4 partly discusses the socio-political impact of the intellectuals’ ideas, but my major focus remains their thought, even for those intellectuals who were prominent politicians. Numerous studies exist on the political history of Ethiopia from the late 19th century to 1974. Many are general overviews of Ethiopian modern and contemporary history (e.g. Bahru 1991, Marcus 1994). The scholarly standing of the works that more specifically deal with the *Ras Täfäri*/Haylä Səlasse period is compromised by two opposite biases. Studies supportive of the 1974 revolution all too easily dismiss Haylä Səlasse’s rule as a ‘feudal regime’. More frequent,

particularly in works written by foreign historians, is a strong pro-Haylä Səlassə bias¹⁰, which sometimes translates in open personality cult for the Emperor¹¹. The approach is generally biographical, with Haylä Səlassə occupying central stage:

The transformation of the diffident and almost self-effacing Täfäri into the Machiavellian Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's most accomplished modern autocrat, has rarely failed to excite interest and investigation. The treatment of the subject has generally been characterized by blind sycophancy or the bemused fascination of an ordinary mortal in face of a Superman (Bahru 1984: 1).

Richard Greenfield's 1965 *Ethiopia: a new political history* offers a refreshingly different perspective, sympathetic towards Haile Selassie's opponents and supportive of the authors of the 1960 coup d'état. Christopher Clapham's 1969 *Haile Selassie's government* remains the most in-depth analytical study over the Ethiopian imperial political system¹². Donald Donham's 1986 overview of Ethiopian social history from the late 19th century to the Därg period is unsurpassed in its analysis of centre-periphery tensions¹³.

While mostly concentrated on the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals, this thesis also takes into account the relationship between this 'old intelligentsia' and the fourth generation of university students. For the role they played in the 1974 Revolution, fourth-generation students are the most studied generational cohort in Ethiopian intellectual history. Historians have tended to stress the ideological rift between the old intelligentsia and the students, and while this may have been overemphasised at times, the sense of rupture was clearly present in the sources of the time, both on the part of the old intelligentsia and on the part of the students. Although continuities certainly existed between the old intelligentsia and the students, the fourth generation marked, it will be argued, a clear break in the history of Ethiopian political thought. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the connections between old intellectuals and fourth-generation students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the fourth generation will largely remain on the background of this study.

¹⁰ For example, Marcus (1983a) and (1987).

¹¹ Good examples of this trend are Sandford (1955), Mosley (1964), Schwab (1979), and Lockot (1989). The image of the 'Conquering Lion of Judah' is almost a constant in these works, starting from their titles (Sanford 1955, Mosley 1964, Gilkes 1975, Schwab 1979). Hoffman (1948) and Spencer (1984) are autobiographical accounts that rest mostly on the author's personal experiences. More sober and academically rigorous assessments of the period are Perham (1948), Hess (1970), Markakis (1974) and Del Boca (1995). Central source for the study of the period is Haylä Səlassə's autobiography (2 volumes, 1972 & 1974, English trans. 1976 & 1994).

¹² Clapham later reviewed and corrected some of the book's positions and conclusions (1992).

¹³ A recent revisitation on the centre/periphery dynamic in the process of Ethiopia's state formation is the PhD thesis of Jean-Nicolas Bach (2011).

Primary object of my analysis is an earlier timeframe, for which other knowledge gaps exist. First of them is the almost total lack of comprehensive studies on political thought in the 1941-1960 period, when the second generation was at its most active and the third generation was beginning their careers. In 2000, Bahru called for more research on the intellectuals of the second half of the 20th century, without which, he pointed out, the intellectual history of Ethiopia ‘would not be complete’ (2000: 12). His study of the pre-1936 period, though, was followed by a second study on the 1960-1974 years, thus leaving out two decades of political debates in the middle. Bahru’s reasons for skipping the 1941-1960 decades, discussed in detail in the following chapters, is that no original political elaboration took place in those years, cultural production consisting mostly in lacklustre and obsequious tributes to Haylä Səlassə. A first argument advanced by this thesis is that Bahru’s judgement dismisses all too quickly a number of significant contributions made by the old generations. A second argument is that the continuities between the pre-Italian occupation and post-liberation period are much more significant than the differences. As such, the thesis contests the historiographical tendency to regard the Italian occupation as a turning point in the cultural and intellectual history of Ethiopia. While Bahru’s 2002 study considers first and second generation as a single ideological bloc, I attempted to draw a more clear-cut distinction between them, showing in particular how the thought of the second generation evolved after the Italian occupation – a long-term perspective that Bahru’s study, stopping in 1936, does not offer. An extensive comparison between the political thought of the three generations, is, moreover, absent in existing scholarly literature, with the third generation being perhaps the most neglected in terms of historical studies. Although the first chapters of the thesis tend to present the three generations as internally uniform, the last chapters move past this preliminary generalisation, exploring a number of internal nuances, differences and individual standpoints.

Drawing from Hunter’s methodological focus on philosophically-significant words, this thesis continues the line of inquiry into the meaning of modernity in the Ethiopian intellectual context. Chapter 1 is a general overview on cultural developments in Ethiopia from the end of the 19th century to the 1960s. It presents the main features and exponents of the three generations of intellectuals that dominated the Ethiopian intellectual scene in this timeframe, and contextualises their texts within the print culture of the period. Chapter 2 argues that the political thought of first-, second-, and third-generation intellectuals was closely connected with the dominant philosophy of history of the imperial state, the ‘Grand Narrative’. It analyses the main tenets of the Grand Narrative and of the counter-historiographies that challenged it throughout the period under analysis, and more specifically explores the way in which the concepts of alterity and coloniality are constructed in the Grand Narrative and in the counter-historiographies. This thesis, in general, pays close attention to ideas related to history and historical development as well as historiographical practices. A considerable amount of articles

have been written in recent years urging a revision of critical methods in Ethiopian historical studies, and they have significantly informed this study's theoretical framework: among others (Bahru 2000, Guazzini 2003, Vezzadini and Guidi 2013), my main references have been Christopher Clapham (2002), Alessandro Triulzi (2002, 2006b), Pietro Toggia (2008), Semir Yusuf (2009b), and Donald Crummey (2001, 2003)¹⁴.

Chapter 3 centres on the intellectuals' conception of modernity, and the way it borrowed from Western unilinear development paradigms while at the same time referring back to local political customs. It discusses how Ethiopian thinkers creatively appropriated selected aspects of the 'Western model' and advocated for their country a 'hybrid modernity' based on a combination of Western science and technology with Ethiopian moral values and monarchical political traditions. By the intellectuals' own admission, such hybridisation failed, and historians of Ethiopia have repeatedly interrogated the causes of the Ethiopian elites' conceptual and pragmatic failure (*käšäfa*) to theorise and then realise the desired modernisation. Chapter 4 presents three scholarly interpretations of the intellectuals' *käšäfa*, and agrees with those scholars that see as contentious the unbalanced relationship between the intellectuals and *Ras Täfäri*/Haylä Səlasse. While the 'failure by co-option' and 'failure by inertia' explanations focus on the intellectuals' socio-economic position and socio-economic choices, the chapter argues that the ideological adherence to the Grand Narrative was also particularly problematic. The modernity envisioned by the intellectuals, it is argued in chapter 5, is grounded in a reductionist conception of alterity and in a negation of Ethiopia's relationship with colonialism. Ethiopia's internal multiculturalism and nation-building policies, its relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa and confrontations with Italian imperialism were all theorised in the same 'acolonial' way. Finally, chapter 6 shows how, starting from the 1960s, the Grand Narrative was slowly 'recolonised'. The counter-historiographies acquired a greater weight, and the notions of alterity and colonality gained a new importance in Ethiopian political thought. Although often self-critical about their own generation's shortcomings, this thesis concludes, the old intelligentsia committed only partially to the recolonisation of the Grand Narrative.

Methodology I: Western philosophical traditions and Ethiopian political thought

A scholarly consensus about Ethiopia's intellectual trends is far from having been established. Labels borrowed from Euro-American political thought are applied to the Ethiopian context without a preliminary discussion of their meaning and implications. Categories like 'liberal', 'reactionary' or 'progressive' are far from having a univocal, established meaning even within the context of European political philosophy, and their uncritical use in the Ethiopian

¹⁴ The debate has continued in many academic reviews of recent publications (see for example Barnes 2003), and in many non-academic blogs and online media (see for example Ayele 2010).

context has led to a series of interpretative inconsistencies and theoretical contradictions. *Ras Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse* is commonly described as spearheading the ‘progressive’ faction of Ethiopian politics, but there is no explicit discussion of what ‘progressivism’ actually means in the case of a 20th century African absolute monarch, nor is it ever problematised that *Ras Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse*’s so-called ‘progressive’ platform was in any possible way profoundly different from that of, just to make one example out of many, famous American progressives Robert La Follette (1855–1925) and Louis Brandeis (1856–1941). On what theoretical grounds can he be deemed a ‘progressive’ considering that his political programme coincided very marginally (if at all) with what ‘progressivism’ was broadly understood to be in the Western political context? Bahru attempted some conceptual clarification in a 1995 article, where he specifies:

I use the term ‘progressive’ here to denote an individual or a group who has attained a more than average perception of the course of historical evolution and is actively committed to promoting that course. Conversely, the term ‘reactionary’ would apply to a group or individual who acts as a brake or stumbling block to the march of times (1995: 101).

Yet, these teleological definitions, if anything, add to the theoretical equivocality, for Bahru does not explain what the ‘march of times’ consists of, or where ‘the course of historical evolution’ is headed. In his later works, Bahru continued to criticise the ‘heavy dependence on Western paradigms’ (2002: 3) affecting the study of Ethiopian intellectual history, but himself uses these Western paradigms throughout his 2002 book, starting from the elusive ‘reformist’ in the title. Commenting on this contradiction, Elizabeth remarks that Bahru ‘[fails] to come up with a coherent framework that situates Ethiopia and Ethiopian intellectuals’ (Elizabeth 2010b: 21). Bahru criticised the tendency of much Ethiopian historiography to use the term ‘modern’, a concept that he admits is ‘particularly nebulous and loaded’, without defining it (1984: 3-4). He consequently dedicates the first chapter of *Pioneers of Change* to defining what modernity is. Elizabeth’s criticism is that Bahru believes there is an objective and universally valid definition of modernity, thus neglecting to account for the geographic, temporal and cultural variability of the term, and for the different ways it was locally interpreted and appropriated. Elizabeth finds that this holds true for Ethiopian scholarship at large:

Any meaningful discussion of modernity, modernism, and modernization in Ethiopia has yet to take place among Ethiopian intellectuals. Scholars have attempted to talk about the projects of Ethiopian modernity in a narrow range of meaning that neglects to construct the processes of modernity within the discursive space of its multiplicity and cultural specificity (2010a: 82).

The unproblematised dependency on Western paradigms and the incongruities ensuing from their use in the Ethiopian context are recurrent features of Ethiopian historiography. The same Ethiopian thinker may happen to be described as ‘reformist’ by a scholar, ‘radical’ by another, and ‘conservative’ by a third one. Taking about Wārḳənāh Əṣāte’s political thought, for example, Garretson states that ‘in so many very ways, Warqenah was quite conservative and traditional’ (Garretson 2012: 264) and that he was ‘too conservative’ to employ class analysis (Garretson 2012: 263). Few pages later, Garretson defines him as a ‘major Ethiopian progressive’ (2012: 268) for defending Ethiopia against Italy, and calls him ‘progressive’ again in other points of his book (e.g. 2012: 132).

Molvaer divides Amharic writers and their characters in ‘conservatives’, ‘radicals’ and ‘escapists’. The terms are not defined and are used in a confusing way. For example, Molvaer says of Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw that ‘[he] shows generally a conservative attitude to change, but still he wants the country to progress’ (2008: 172); a few pages later, he again reasserts that ‘conservatives usually want some kind of change, but not in the social system itself’ (2008: 176). Yet, this same ‘conservative’ attitude (favouring change, but not in the social system) is classified as ‘radical’ a few pages later: ‘there are, of course, many forms and degrees of radicalism, and in Amharic literature we meet people who want to change customs and attitudes, or to speed up progress without altering the social structure; and there are others who want a more fundamental change in society, new attitudes and an acceleration of economic growth’ (2008: 180). What are these forms and degrees of radicalism, Molvaer does not specify. The ‘escapists’ are so defined not on the grounds of their ideology, but on the grounds of their occupation: they are either people ‘who do not work in or fit into any established political structure’ or people who ‘have adapted themselves to the existing system and have usually become rather faceless, purposeless members of the bureaucracy’ (2008: 190).

As a basic starting consideration, if we consider the terms from just only their etymology, and not in the philosophical-political sense they have acquired in Euro-American thought, all of the intellectuals mentioned in chapter 1 were ‘progressive’ and ‘reformist’. They all wanted the country to progress, both economically and politically. All of them advocated some type of change in the direction of a growing technological sophistication and societal reorganisation. The final objective was always reinforcing Ethiopia’s political position and its economic leverage – ultimately bridging the power gap between Ethiopia and Western powers. Similarly, there was not much disagreement on the tools to use in order to achieve this objective: first-, second- and third-generation Ethiopian thinkers consistently chose a reformist path, and it was only in the 1960s that the fourth generation pursued a revolutionary option. The difference among the various positions depended on the *kind* of reforms that were deemed necessary, and on the *kind* of measures to implement in order to concretise those changes. Once the terms ‘progressive’ and ‘reformist’ are considered not only in their strictly etymologic

meaning but in their whole philosophical genealogy, their applicability to the Ethiopian scenario comes immediately into question. More objections arise from the fact that virtually all of 20th century intellectuals upheld the Grand Narrative and its idea of Ethiopia as a God-ordained absolute monarchy, a choice that, in a Euro-American theoretical framework, could not be other than ‘conservative’. The Grand Narrative being quite a ‘traditional’ component of Ethiopian political thought, one may legitimately wonder what the intellectuals’ credentials as ‘modernisers’ are exactly based on.

Given the local distinctiveness of Ethiopian political thought, the point could be made that classifying Ethiopian intellectuals according to Western concepts such as ‘traditionalist’, ‘conservative’, ‘reactionary’, ‘moderniser’, ‘radical’, ‘liberal’, or ‘progressive’ detracts, rather than adds, to our understanding of Ethiopian intellectual history. These terms remain methodologically misleading and heuristically empty without an in-depth analysis of the way they were appraised by Ethiopian intellectuals themselves. Following these considerations, this thesis analyses the political thought of first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals through Amharic terminology, focusing in particular on the key notion of *zämänawinnät*. *Zämänawinnät* is the way Ethiopians translated the word ‘modernity’¹⁵, but chapter 3 argues that *zämänawinnät* and ‘modernity’ have different histories, different semantic and ideological connotations, and therefore are not equivalent. Of course, the interpretation of what *zämänawinnät* meant was not univocal, but was nevertheless stable enough to identify some general trends in the way the concept was understood. From Emperor Tewodros II onwards, and even more under Haylä Səlassə, *zämänawinnät* became an integral component of the Grand Narrative. Intellectuals close to the rulers were expected to fully embrace the official imperial ideology, and indeed all the intellectuals discussed in chapter 1, who in various degrees worked in state institutions, were in favour of *zämänawinnät*, even if some of them, as we shall see, came to criticise some aspects of it. Identifying names and biographies of anti-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals is instead much harder, since state-controlled media and cultural infrastructures did not allow significant deviations from the official ideology. The two orientations, pro- and anti-*zämänawinnät*, did not correspond to two separate and well-defined social blocs. The intellectuals occupied a variety of position across the political spectrum, from a closer identification with state-sponsored ideas of *zämänawinnät* to a more critical, reserved approach. Most writers embraced some aspects of *zämänawinnät* and rejected others, often changing opinion during their lifetime.

A second problem of existing scholarly literature on Ethiopian (and indeed African) intellectual history is its tendency to equate ‘modernisation’ with ‘Westernisation’¹⁶. The more a

¹⁵ At the beginning of the century, the expression most commonly used was *zämänawi səlṭane* (‘modern civilisation’; the concept of *səlṭane* is discussed in detail in chapter 3). See Bromber (2013: 72-73).

¹⁶ See El-Malik & Gruffydd Jones (2015) for a similar line of criticism against existing scholarship in African political thought.

thinker advocates changes associated with Western modernity, the more historians conclude he/she is a 'progressive' or 'liberal'. On the contrary, the more a thinker was rejecting the traits of Western modernity, the more he/she was labelled a 'conservative'. In Ethiopian historiography, 'modernity and modernism [...] have often been used [...] to signify Europeization and Westernization' (Elizabeth 2010b: 82). An irreconcilable ideological conflict has been thought to exist between native tradition and foreign modernity, as it appears from the titles of some studies on the Ethiopian past (e.g. Levine 1965, Gilkes 1975, Molvaer 2008a, Yonas 2010). Such alleged opposition has been used as a frame of reference to read Ethiopian intellectual history. Being 'progressive', in this interpretation, gets equalled to promoting 'Western modernity', and being 'conservative' gets similarly associated to the rejection of such 'modernity' in favour of the preservation of the country's traditions.

A similar framework is employed, for example, by Philip Curtin in his pioneering *Africa and the West*, which classifies African intellectuals as either 'modernisers' (1972: 234-236) or 'traditionalists' (1972: 236-238) on the grounds of their position vis-à-vis the 'modern', understood by Curtin as 'any of the variety of different kinds of societies that are capable of using industrial technology to create a high-production and high-consumption economy' (1972: 232). African thought is presented by Curtin as consisting in 'different degrees of combinations along a mono dimensional spectrum' (Salvadore 2009: 127). On one extreme Curtin places 'those who advocated a complete departure from the traditional culture in exchange for western models' (Curtin 1972: 234), and on the other end of the spectrum are located 'those who wanted to preserve their culture as it was to return to a remembered past before the western impact' (Curtin 1972: 236). 'Neo-traditionalists' (oddly classified among the 'modernisers') and 'defensive modernisers' (oddly classified among the 'traditionalists') are somewhat in the middle together with the 'utopian modernisers' and 'utopian reactionaries'. Curtin erects his own personal definition of modernity as the one classifying principle of African thought, and thus claims for himself the epistemic right of setting the terms of the African political debate. Indeed *Africa and the West* sets out to explore, as per its subtitle, the 'intellectual responses to European culture', thus presenting African thought as a derivative philosophical tradition, existing only as a reaction to 'the secret of western power' (1972: 233), which 'was only natural for Africans to grasp for' (1972: 233).

In the case of early 20th century Ethiopia, Curtin's definition of the 'modern' describes very imprecisely what Ethiopian intellectuals understood as *zämänawinnät*. Industrial technology, which Curtin puts at the centre of his definition of modernity, was an integral part of the way Ethiopian intellectuals understood *zämänawinnät*, but *zämänawinnät* also had other meanings and connotations. The simplistic division between pro-Western progressives and anti-Western conservatives fails to capture the ideological complexity of Ethiopian political philosophy. This thesis argues that the thought of Ethiopian intellectuals was shaped around

internal political issues and not only as a response to the idea of Western progress/development. In fact, as we shall see, 20th century Ethiopian political thought shows a pronounced continuity with earlier local thought traditions more than it engages with Western ideologies.

Methodology II: Amharic literature in the history of Ethiopian political thought

Amharic literature plays a major role in my investigation, and another methodological argument advanced by this thesis is that literary sources are central to any exploration of Ethiopian political thought during the imperial era. Most Ethiopian ideologues were also influential fiction writers, and their literary works are imbued with their political ideas. Literature was often used as a fictional exemplification of wider socio-political arguments over the management of the Ethiopian state. These literary works have never been employed before as historical sources to trace the development of Ethiopian political thought – yet they prove invaluable to reconstruct the debates going on at the time. The authors use the characters to voice their own positions on Ethiopian society; the antagonists air objections that were likely to reflect the ones put forward by the author's ideological adversaries.

Twentieth century Ethiopian intellectuals were fascinated by the interdisciplinary links between literature, philosophy and political science, and actively cultivated them. Sahlä-Selasse Bərhanä-Maryam, for example, acknowledged among his main ideological influences Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Molvaer 1997a: 365). He also admired the existentialism of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, and it was 'significant for him that these philosophers were also literary men and their literature is based on their philosophy' (Molvaer 1997a: 365). Overall, he 'found that there is a strong connecting theme between philosophy, politics and literature' and he 'read a lot in each of these disciplines in his life' (Molvaer 1997a: 366). The intellectuals considered in this thesis shared the same interdisciplinary outlook. Most of them were equally at ease in fiction and non-fiction, and published creative pieces as well as theoretical studies.

From the point of view of the history of Geez/Amharic textual genres, historiography and philosophy always had a strong connection with literary forms. The main historiographical tradition 20th century Amharic writers could draw from were the imperial chronicles. They were traditionally titled *tarik* ('history') or *zena* ('narrative, story'), often had an epic character, and many of them are 'not only valuable documentary sources, but also outstanding literary masterpieces' (Chernetsov & al. 2007: 40). Geez and Amharic philosophical works, too, came under the guise of literature, with a long tradition of philosophical texts that make ample use of narratives, parables, adages and rich imagery. This is not unique to the Ethiopian context. Philosophy has always been closely connected with literary history, and works of 'philosophical

fiction', as well as 'novels of ideas' abound in the European tradition just like in other philosophical traditions, such as the Arabic, the Persian and the Indian one. Some works of political philosophy proceed according to an abstract, logical argumentative style; others are dialogues, poetic fragments or long epic poems; others adopt an oracular or prophetic style. A considerable corpus of scholarly research has been developed on the links between literature, intellectual history and political thought, starting from David Harlan's 1989 *Intellectual history and the return of literature*. This line of investigation has been revitalised in recent years, following what has been called a 'narrative turn' (Whitebrook 1996), a 'literary turn' (Stow 2007) or an 'aesthetic turn' (Kompridis 2014) in political thought and analysis¹⁷.

In the context of African studies, M. S. C. Okolo has proposed a far-reaching theoretical framework for reading African literature as political philosophy (2007: 5-34). Kai Kresse's work on Swahili-language philosophical traditions is based on an equally interdisciplinary outlook. Kresse envisions an 'anthropology of philosophy' based on an analysis of pre-existing oral and written texts, i.e. texts that are not constituted by the researcher him/herself. This departs from ethnophilosophy's almost exclusive reliance on interviews with local informants, often chosen as representatives of a 'traditional', 'authentic' lifestyle¹⁸. Kresse also points at the importance, for researchers, to adapt themselves to the philosophical discourse they are studying, analysing key terms and themes as they appear in the source material, without imposing on the text the researcher's own theoretical scheme (2007: 24-26). Drawing from Kresse's work, Alena Rettová sees 'Afrophone literatures as a prominent *locus* of philosophical discourse in African languages' (2007: 23). A methodology based on written Afrophone sources, she argues, successfully avoids the pitfalls of ethnophilosophy. For Rettová,

The decisive turn [in African philosophical studies], pioneered by Kai Kresse, consists in the fact that, rather than trying to introduce African languages artificially into African philosophy by the philosophers' deliberation, the researcher looks at what discourses existing in African societies are the domain of philosophical reflexion. Naturally, most of these discourses take place in African languages. The issue is thus not to express an originally Europhone philosophical discourse (with its specific topics, largely derived from Western philosophy) in African languages, but rather to recognize as philosophy that which effectively functions as such in African-language environments (2007: 36-37).

An analogous methodological framework has been adopted in this thesis to research Ethiopian political thought. Bahru Zewde, as we have seen, thinks that the 1941-1960 period is, in the

¹⁷ Central works in this area are Rorty (1989), Nussbaum (1995), Horton and Baumeister (1996), Whitebrook (2001), Holden (2003), McManus (2005), Johnson (2007), and Schiff (2014).

¹⁸ This is true, for instance, for Henry Odera Oruka's 'sage philosophy' (1990).

history of Ethiopian political thought, less significant than the pre-war and post-1960 decades. He explains his position on the grounds that ‘it was more in the realm of culture, notably in literature and art, than in that of independent political thought, that the immediate post-war generation made its impact’ (Bahru 2002: 211). In my perspective, post-1941 literary production is instead one of the main forums where political thought was expressed and articulated. As such, I do not see a clear-cut separation between literature and art on one side, and ‘independent political thought’ on the other. In novels and plays, characters extensively debate the foundations of the monarchy, the class structure of society, the role of the intellectual class, Ethiopia’s position in the international community, and the best educational policies and development strategies for the country. Most of the times, the author identifies with his protagonist, and uses the discussions between characters to rebut the positions of his ideological adversaries. Even when the author clearly sides with one character, though, the dialogic quality of Amharic literary works allows different ideologies to be voiced. This was often a strategy consciously pursued to circumvent censorship. Arguments that the censors would have certainly found problematic were ascribed to negative characters that, reassuringly for the censors, end up being defeated or punished. Before their inevitable downfall, the protagonist’s opponents are nevertheless given the chance to defend their positions, and sometimes the authors lend the antagonists’ ideas a considerable degree of legitimacy. Literature can therefore be used to reconstruct the different philosophical perspectives present in Ethiopian political thought at the time, and to analyse both their clashes and constructive interactions.

This thesis, therefore, draws extensively from Amharic literary scholarship. Both Ethiopian scholars¹⁹ and foreign scholars²⁰ have greatly contributed to the study of written Amharic literature. Two anthologies of essays on Ethiopian literature have been edited by Tadesse Adera and Ali Jimale Ahmed (1995 and 2008)²¹. Taye and Shiferaw (2000) and Yonas (2001) have compiled comprehensive bibliographical reviews on the history of Amharic literary scholarship. Taye has also written an overview of the papers on Ethiopian literature presented from 2000 to 2007 at the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (Taye 2009). The

¹⁹ Among Ethiopian scholars, the most significant contributions are those by Asfaw Damte (1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1980/81, 1981/82), Yonas Admassu (1995a, 1995b, 2010), Taye Assefa (1983, 1986, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1994, 1995, 2000), Debebe Seifu (1984, 1988, 1994), Fekade Azeze (1979, 1988, 1997, 2007), and Tewodros Gebre (2006, 2013).

²⁰ Among the most prominent foreign scholars of Amharic literature are Carlo Conti Rossini (1900), Enrico Cerulli (1926, 1928, 1932a, 1932b, 1933, 1968), Luigi Fusella (1943, 1946, 1951, 1960, 1961, 1963, 1984, 1984-86, 1987), Ignazio Guidi (1922, 1932, 1932/33), Martino Mario Moreno (1932, 1933, 1957), Salvatore Tedeschi (1984), Elena Sengal (1943), Pierre Comba (1955, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1964), Albert Gérard (1968, 1971), Alain Rouaud (1984, 1991, 2002, 2003), Joseph Tubiana (1984), Marcel Cohen (1925), Thomas Leiper Kane (1974, 1975), Reidulf Knut Molvaer (1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2008), Joanna Mantel-Niećko (1985), J. Roger Kurtz (2007, 2010), Stephen Wright (1963) and Jack Fellman (1991, 1993, 1994, 1996). Jane Plastow and Galina Balashova have published on the history of Amharic theatre (Plastow 1996, 2010 and 2013; Balashova 1993, 1994a and 1994b).

²¹ The 2008 volume comprises the whole of the Horn of Africa.

journal *Callaloo* dedicated a 2010 special issue to ‘Ethiopian literature, art and culture’ (Dagmawi, Tillet & Elizabeth 2010), including the translation into English of famous Amharic poems by Yoftahe Nəguse, Mängəstu Lämman, Şəgaye Gäbrä-Mädhən and Yohannəs Admassu. Bibliographical overviews and analytical studies have also been published on Ethiopian literature in English²². The BA, MA and PhD dissertations produced by Ethiopian students, particularly at Addis Ababa University, are an underexplored but often precious critical source²³. Lastly, many of the intellectuals considered in the thesis, particularly third-generation ones, were themselves literary critics, and contributed works of theory²⁴ as well as reviewing each other’s works in newspapers and magazines²⁵.

²² Huntsberger (1973), Beer (1977), Fekade (1985), Bardolph (1986), Abeba (2002) and Tewodros Bogale (2002).

²³ Some students focused on single authors (Akalu 1981, Bayleyegn 2011, Fantahun 1995, Mekonnen 1995, Michael 2008, Molla 2008, Yimer 1981, Taddesse Alemu 1992, Teklu 1983, Tena 1991, Tsegaye 1987, Tesfaye 1986). Others compared the use of narrative or stylistic devices in the works of two or three authors (Assefa Makonnen 2009, Misrak 2002, Zerihun 1983, Nebiyu 2012, Selamawit 1994). Finally, there are some general overviews of Amharic literary developments (Assefa Aregahegne 1981, Zelealem 1990, Anteneh 1993, Girma Mengistie 2002). Some high-quality MA and PhD dissertations were completed abroad (Yonas 1995b, Taye 1986, Fikre 1983, Ghirmai 1992, Anteneh 2014, Fekade 1979 and 1998).

²⁴ There are numerous examples in virtually all major Amharic- and English-language Ethiopian newspapers. In this thesis I have drawn from Mängəstu Lämman (1973, 1984) and Täsfaye Gässässa (1964).

²⁵ See, for example, Sahlä-Səlassə Bərhanä-Maryam’s 1974 review of Daññaččäw Wərku’s novels.

Chapter 1 – Setting the scene

This chapter offers an overview of key developments and key figures in Ethiopian intellectual history from 1896 to 1974. The first paragraph describes the main trends and works of Amharic literary and intellectual history and traces the evolution of Ethiopian cultural infrastructures, including education and the media. The focus of the paragraph is on the Christian highlands, from where the families of the majority of intellectuals studied here hailed. The chapter discusses the general characteristics shared by all intellectuals considered in this thesis, then moves on to the issue of periodisation and identifies four successive generations of intellectuals. Only the most relevant writers have been included (full biographical and bibliographical data are listed in Appendix 1)²⁶. For the second generation, a greater number of intellectuals has been considered to assess the effects of the Italian occupation and to examine the historiographical interpretation of the second generation as a ‘missing generation’. The last chapter shifts the analysis from the authors to their texts. It describes the major features of Ethiopian print culture, particularly its genre conventions and textual traditions. It then presents the major critical schools in the study of Amharic literature and discusses how this body of literary theory intersects and interrelates with Ethiopian political theory.

Historical background

From the medieval period until the late 19th century, education in the Christian highlands was for the majority church-based. The main centres of learning were Orthodox churches and monasteries, where manuscripts were copied by hand and stored in libraries. Some manuscripts were composed anew and some were translated from other languages, often Greek or Arabic. In these religious centres of learning, Geez remained the dominant language, while Amharic (in the north-western and southern part of the highland plateau) and Tigrinya (in the north-east) gradually supplanted Geez as spoken languages outside the church. A diglossia thus existed between Geez as the high language of written culture and Amharic/Tigrinya as ‘secular’ spoken languages. Amharic progressively acquired authority as the language spoken inside the imperial court (*læssanä nəgus*, ‘royal language’) and as a lingua franca of the Ethiopian highlands. Under Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868) the imperial chronicles and other state documents started being produced in Amharic, making Amharic the *de facto* official language of the court. Geez maintained its role as language of the Orthodox Church – a role it still retains nowadays. A sophisticated and highly codified system of religious education, comprising different levels and curricula, was offered by churches to children and young men from surrounding communities. Subjects included the study of Geez, of the Bible and Biblical exegesis, of

²⁶ In some cases, dates of birth and death are not available, or for the same intellectual different dates of birth and death are recorded. This thesis generally follows the dates given in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.

religious music or *zema* and traditional poetry or *kəne* (Teshome 1979: 10ff, Girma Amare 1967). Those who completed the highest educational cycles went on to become teachers themselves. They had the option to remain within the church, to found their own schools or to work free-lance. If working free-lance, they were often employed by aristocratic families as private tutors.

Besides churches and monasteries, another prominent centre of knowledge production was the imperial court. With the church offering the only available educational facilities, emperors had to rely on church education to recruit trained civil servants such as judges, governors, scribes, treasurers and administrators. Emperors also sponsored cultural activities and attracted scholars to their court. Iyasu the Great (r. 1682–1706), for example, ‘made the city of Gondar the center not only of religious activities but of secular learning and culture, and during his reign more than five hundred scholars lived in Gojam’ (Teshome 1979: 11). Some emperors were scholars in their own right. Gälawdewos (r. 1521/1522-1559) ‘spent 3,000 ounces of gold on the collection of Ge’ez manuscripts, and he himself wrote the Confessions of faith’ (Teshome 1979: 11). Collections of manuscripts were preserved in monasteries and imperial libraries, the most notable of which was Tewodros II’s library at Mäkdäla (Rita Pankhurst 1973, Metikou 1991 and 1992). Each emperor appointed an official chronicler to record the history of his reign, and the imperial chronicles are to date the most important and the most studied sources of the political history of the Abyssinian Empire²⁷.

This scenario underwent significant changes starting from the latter half of the 19th century when European mission schools opened in the Horn of Africa in ever-increasing numbers. Protestant and Catholic missions started to recruit and educate locals, many of whom were given a chance to study in Europe and later came to play a significant role in Ethiopian politics (Bahru 2002: 15-19). By the time of the Italian invasion in 1935, about 2,000 students were enrolled in denominational schools (Vestal 2005: 234). Missionaries also introduced in the Horn of Africa, starting from the 1860s, the first printing presses, publishing mostly religious books and newsletters²⁸. The first newspapers were published in European languages by the Italians in Eritrea and by the French in the area around Djibouti and Dəre Dawa (Meseret 2013: 6-8)²⁹. The first Ethiopian government-owned newspaper was launched in 1901 by Emperor Mənilək II (r. 1889-1913). The Emperor gave it the title *Aəmro* (‘Intellect’ or ‘Intelligence’) and entrusted the editorship to an Amharic-speaking Greek businessman, Andreas E. Kavadia. Amharic was, by then, firmly established as the official language of culture and politics, with

²⁷ On the royal chronicles in Ethiopian historiography see Pankhurst (1967) and McCann (1979).

²⁸ On the beginning of printing in Ethiopia see Wright (1967) and Strelcyn (1979).

²⁹ French-language newspapers published by various French associations or institutions in Dəre Dawa and neighbouring Djibouti continued to remain influential in the intellectual history of Ethiopia, particularly in the pre-1936 period (see Rouaud 1994, Pankhurst 2003 and Pankhurst 2004).

Geez increasingly relegated to religious matters. *Aəmro* came out weekly in Amharic, although the publication was irregular until 1924 due to, among other difficulties, the inadequacy of the printing equipment. Initially circulating in a couple of dozen handwritten copies, it later increased its circulation to 200 copies, mostly sold to the nobility and the imperial court.

Mənilək also founded, in 1908, the first government school in Ethiopia, called Mənilək II School, a primary school for boys (Fasil Teshome 1986). The language of instruction was French and the curriculum included English, Arabic, Italian, Amharic, Geez, mathematics, science and sports. The school started off with 100 students and a total of 3,000 passed through it by 1924 (Bahru 2002: 24). For many years, teachers and headmasters were for the most part Egyptian Copts, in the hope they would somehow mediate between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ perspectives. The Orthodox Church, which had been holding an absolute monopoly over education, strongly resented the presence of government schools; many parents were equally suspicious, fearing their children would convert to Catholicism or Protestantism if sent there. Traditional church education remained the most vastly available educational facility. The Raguel Church in Ənəto, on the northern outskirts of Addis Abäba, produced a number of graduates who came to exert ‘much more preponderant influence in the political life of the country than the foreign-educated intellectuals’ (Bahru 2002: 73)³⁰. The increased presence of foreigners in Ethiopia, and their increased interaction with locals, meant that many young Ethiopians came to benefit from the patronage of European sponsors, who, with the permission of the Emperor, paid for their education in Europe. One such youth was Afäwärk Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, who published the first Amharic-language novel in 1908 while working in Italy (Fusella 1951, Fellman 1991). Addis Abäba, which had been founded by Mənilək as capital of Šäwa in 1886, was rapidly changing in those years, and the new generation of Western-educated intellectuals came to have a distinctively urban lifestyle. Places for social gatherings were the Ətege Hotel, founded by Empress Taytu in 1907, and several smaller private hotels, as well as newly-emerging restaurants and drinking houses. Nightclubs, specifically aimed at attracting youth, started to become popular in these years (Eshetu 1986, Garretson 2000).

It was under Empress Zäwditu’s rule and Ras Täfäri’s regency (1916-1930) that the first Amharic play, Täklä-Hawaryat’s *Fabula*, was staged in 1920/21³¹. The play contained a critique of Ethiopia’s ruling class, and was consequently banned. The ban extended to all theatrical performances and remained in place until 1930. Täfäri soon proceeded to found, in 1923, his own printing press, initially called ‘The Printing Press of the Heir to the Throne of Ethiopia His Highness Ras Täfäri Mäkönnən’ (*YaItopya Mängəst Alga Wäraš YäLəul Ras Täfäri Mäkönnən*) later renamed (in its anglicised form) ‘Birhanena Selam Press’ after the flagship

³⁰ For more information on the Raguel church and associated school, see Wudu (1989).

³¹ For a history of Ethiopian theatre, alongside Plastow (1996) see the overviews by Täsfaye (1964), Mengistu (1983) and Surafel (2009).

newspaper the printing press published from 1925 onwards. *Bərhanənnā Sālam* came out weekly and had a circulation of 500 copies, almost all of them sold in Addis Abāba to registered subscribers (Meseret 2013: 32-33)³². The printing press also published religious books, at least one of Hərūy Wāldä-Səlassē's novels, Wārḳənāh Əšäte's 'World geography in Amharic' (1928) and some school textbooks. Hərūy was the dominant figure of pre-war literary production and in the 1920s and 1930s wrote a number of short novels of didactic character addressed to the new readership of young people educated in European-style schools. The new 20th century educational system and printing techniques also introduced new textual genres: the newspaper article, the novel, theatre, modern historiography (Bahru 2000: 5). The intellectuals appropriated and developed the new genres, with modern historiography, newspapers and Amharic literature rapidly growing since their inception in the 1900s and 1910s.

Just like Mənilək before him, Täfäri also founded in 1925 a primary school named after himself. The Täfäri Mäkonnen School, whose first director was Wārḳənāh Əšäte (who had already been involved in the management of the Mənilək II School), had an Anglophone and a Francophone stream. In its first year, the school enrolled 32 students, and their number rose up to 200 in 1930-31. Garretson describes the school as 'almost an extension of [Täfäri's] court' (2012: 128):

The students were invited to his palace at Christmas and given presents and on a number of occasions the students were fed from the Ras's kitchens, especially soon after it was founded. [Täfäri] regularly attended the end of the academic year prize giving ceremonies, personally awarding the prizes; later, once he was emperor, he invited the students to his birthday party at which they would put on a theatrical performance (Garretson 2012: 129).

For the newly-emerging class of journalists, educators, fiction writers and theatre practitioners, cultural infrastructures outside government schools and the imperial court were almost completely absent. With the exclusion of mission stations, private printing presses were non-existent. Täfäri, who in 1930 was crowned Emperor Haylä Səlassē, 'ensured that the theatre under imperial patronage would evolve [...] as a laudatory medium under the direct control of the crown' (Plastow 1996: 51). The plays of the two most prominent playwrights of the pre-occupation period, Yoftahe Nəguse and Mälaku Bäggosäw, were commissioned by the Emperor and staged either at court or in government schools³³. The year 1930 saw the establishment of the first government school for girls, the *Ətege* Mänän School (named after Haylä Səlassē's wife). Schools in the provinces also opened, for a total of 21 government schools and 4,200 enrolled pupils in 1936. In the 1930s, students started being sent abroad for education in a more

³² Before the Italian invasion, the printing press opened two other branches in Harär and Jəmma.

³³ Schools would remain important locations for amateur theatrical performances in the post-1941 period.

systematic and organised way. In 1925, only 25 students were sent overseas, but by 1934 the number had risen to 200. At the outbreak of the 1935 Italian invasion, Ethiopia had a population of 15 million people, and Addis Abäba was reported to have 90,000 inhabitants in 1938.

In the imminence of the war with Italy in July 1935, some intellectuals (the chief inspirator was Mäkonnen Habtä-Wäld) set up the *YäHagär Fəḳər Mahbär* ('Ethiopian Patriotic Association', literally 'Love of the Country Association') with the main objective of doing agitation work among the population (Kiros 1983). As part of the Association's campaigns, Yoftahe Nəguse and the journalist Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs³⁴ composed works to denounce the Italians' machinations and encourage the people to rally around the Emperor and fight for their country. During the Italian occupation, pro-Italian propaganda newspapers were founded by fascist authorities in Italian, Arabic and Amharic (the trilingual *Corriere dell'Impero/YäḲesar Mängəst Mäləktäñña*, and the Amharic *YäRoma Bərhan*, 'The light of Rome')³⁵. The Italians also launched a radio station, which broadcasted via loudspeakers in the marketplaces and public squares of Addis Abäba and of the most important provincial cities (Gartley 1997, Meseret 2013: 64). The first newscaster in Amharic for this radio was Kəbbädä Mikael. The fascists closed all local schools, and converted them into schools for Italian children. Just like in Eritrea, the 'natives' were only allowed to attend primary school up to the fourth grade, where they were taught practical subjects in simplified Italian, as this was thought to be sufficient to prepare them for the semi-menial tasks they were expected to perform in the fascist order (Pankhurst 1972).

Both the population and urbanisation rate grew rapidly after Haylä Səlassə was restored to the throne in 1941. Ethiopia had 20 million inhabitants in 1955 and 33 million in 1975, while the population of Addis Abäba grew from 450,000 in 1961 to 680,000 in 1967³⁶. Efforts to increase literacy and expand the educational infrastructure intensified in the post-war period. The first Ethiopian secondary school, the Haylä Səlassə I Secondary School, opened in 1943,

³⁴ There were two prominent individuals both called Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs: one was *Blatten Geta* Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (1894-1981), journalist and editor; while the other one was *Şəhəfə Təəzaz* Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (1901-1976), one of the most powerful politicians of the post-1941 period. For a biographical study on *Şəhəfə Təəzaz* Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs and his role in post-liberation politics, see Makonnen Tegegn (1997). For *Blatten Geta* Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs see Fəḳadä (1987/88).

³⁵ A number of anti-Italian publications were launched in this period, generally printed abroad and clandestinely circulated in Ethiopia. The most famous are *New Times and Ethiopia News*, founded in the UK by Sylvia Pankhurst, and *Voice of Ethiopia*, launched by Mälaku Bäyyan in the United States. Both were in English and their main audience was the international community, although few copies (some translated into Amharic) were successfully smuggled into occupied Ethiopia. Pankhurst (2009) cites another clandestine publication, *Amdä Bərhan Zälyopya* ('Pillar of light of Ethiopia'), written by an Armenian, Johannes Semerjibashian. The newspaper's seven issues were circulated in twenty copies only, but were read, it seems, by all the most high-profile Ethiopian patriot leaders. Lastly, *Banderaččən* ('Our flag') was a field newspaper published by the British in Sudan and aimed at keeping patriot leaders informed about the victories of the Allies in the Second World War.

³⁶ See Getahun (2007) for a history of Addis Abäba in the period 1941-1974.

followed in 1946 by the General Wingate Secondary School, a joint venture of the Ethiopian and British governments. In 1946, the Täfäri Mäkönnən School was equipped to offer secondary education. The total number of children enrolled in government schools in 1944 was 20,000. By 1952 the country's 400 primary schools and 11 secondary schools enrolled 60,000 students; by 1960/61, there were 26 secondary schools in the country, of which 14 in the provinces and 12 in Addis Abäba. A number of private primary schools, private secondary schools and vocational, technical and special schools opened in the following years; in the 1960s, mission schools and private schools enrolled a total of 52,000 students. Literacy, though, remained very low. By 1965, the level of illiteracy among the male population over 15 years was around 92%³⁷.

The influence of the British in culture and education was pervasive from the liberation to the end of the Second World War (1941-1945), and English replaced French as dominant foreign language. The British influence was supplanted from the 1950s by the American educational model and American advisors. A series of successive curriculum reforms took place in the 1950s and 1960s, the most important of which made Amharic the language of primary school instruction and English the language of instruction for later grades. The first tertiary-level educational facility, the University College of Addis Abäba (UCAA), opened in 1950. Different colleges were established throughout the 1950s, and were merged in 1961 into Haylä Səlasse I University (now called Addis Abäba University). In 1963 a Creative Arts Centre was founded to promote theatre, music and fine arts. Before 1950, students (like Mängəstu Lämna and the painter Afäwärk Təkle) who finished secondary school in Ethiopia were sent abroad for university studies, while after the opening of the various university colleges in Addis they could achieve their bachelor's degrees in Ethiopia, and were only sent abroad for their postgraduate studies.

The first book to be printed in Addis Abäba after the 1941 liberation was a 150-page anthology entitled *Yaddis Zämān Mäzmur Səla Näşannät Kəbər YäItyopya Wətat Şəhafiwočč Yädärrəsut* ('Hymns of the new era in praise of independence composed by Young Ethiopian Writers', 1941). The volume, compiled by Yəлма Dərresa, contains 50 praise poems, and Yəлма's preface set the agenda of post-liberation literary production by encouraging Amharic writers to turn to modern genres like the novel, short story and drama (Fusella 1946: 98-101). The post-independence period saw a progressive opening up of the cultural arena, and Amharic literature began to develop more extensively, thanks to an expanded readership base. Fictional narration 'took root in Ethiopian literary taste and acquired a degree of popularity, *ləbb wälləd* – the novel – taking the position of the leading genre' (Asfaw and Nosnitsin 2007: 532). Post-war

³⁷ Although data are scarce for the period, the figure would have certainly been much higher if including the female population. Solomon Inquai presents extensive data on adult literacy in the mid-1950s, including a breakdown of urban/rural and male/female population (1969). Compare Ethiopia's data, for example, with Tanganyika, where in 1961 adult literacy was at 16%, roughly four times higher than in Ethiopia (Iliffe 1979: 574).

production continued both Afäwäṛk Gäbrä-Iyyäsus's theme of journey and travel and Həruy Wäldä-Selasse's theme of the reform-minded returning student. New recurrent themes were the Italian occupation, the problem of prostitution, and the life story of Emperor Tewodros. Books published in the 1950s and 1960s were generally printed in 2,000-3,000 copies, with the most successful ones sometimes reaching 10,000 copies. Most copies sold slowly, and the authors had to pay for publication. Abbe Gubäñña was the only Amharic writer to make the brave (and not entirely successful) attempt to live exclusively off the money earned with the sales of his novels, while all other authors maintained full-time jobs in parallel to their literary activities. Book reviews and articles of literary criticism were published in Amharic- and English-language magazines and newspapers. Haylä Səlasse's Silver Jubilee in 1955 'saw an outpouring of literary works as many writers wanted to render homage to their sovereign' (Kane 1975: 14). The Emperor was 'so grateful that he invited the writers to the palace to express his appreciation and also to decorate them' (Shiferaw 2004: 24). The Haylä Səlasse I Prize Trust, established in 1963 (and discontinued after 1974), awarded 2 prizes per year for literature and the arts: Kəbbädä Mikael won it in 1964, Şəgaye Gäbrä-Mädhən in 1966, Mängəstu Ləmma in 1967, and Haddis Aləmayähu in 1968³⁸.

New government-owned printing presses were established in the post-1941 period³⁹, and a number of new magazines and newspapers started being produced. Some were continuations of anti-Fascist newspapers published during the Italian occupation, like Sylvia Pankhurst's *New Times and Ethiopia News* (replaced in 1956 by the *Ethiopia Observer*), or *Banderaččən* ('Our flag', which was later renamed *Sändäḵ Alamaččən* and complemented with an Arabic version). Some were new publications, including the still-active *Addis Zämən* ('New era', in Amharic, weekly 1941-1958, daily 1958-present) and *The Ethiopian Star* (1941-1943), renamed *The Ethiopian Herald* in 1943 (in English, weekly 1943-1958, daily 1958-present). Other important newspapers, now discontinued, were *YəZarəyətū Ityōpya* ('Today's Ethiopia', in Amharic and French, weekly 1952-1996), *YäItyōpya Dəms* ('The voice of Ethiopia', 1955-1970), and *Mänən* (1955-1975, in Amharic and English, a monthly magazine named after Haylä Səlasse's wife, initially conceived for a female audience, which reached a circulation of 10,000 copies in 1963)⁴⁰. The latter two publications were published by the *YəHagär Fəḵər Mahbär*, which was revived in 1942 (Kiros 1983). In its new buildings, the Association started to host musical and theatrical performances, eventually renaming itself *YəHagär Fəḵər Tiyatər* ('Love of the Country Theatre') in 1957/58 and becoming Addis Abäba's second most important

³⁸ This was part of a series of initiatives aimed at reinforcing the role of Amharic as official state language. Part of these measures was the founding, in 1972, of the National Academy of the Amharic Language.

³⁹ In 1944, the Patriarchate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church also established its own printing press, called *Tənsae ZäGubae*.

⁴⁰ An Arabic weekly was also launched in 1942, *Al-Alam*. For more information, see Hussein (1994).

theatre after the Haylä Səlasse I Theatre (inaugurated in 1955)⁴¹. Plays were also regularly organised in government and private schools, both in Addis Abāba and in the provinces⁴². Each secondary school in the country had its own school journals, which often served as a springboard for the career of young authors⁴³. Other important newspapers were published abroad by various Ethiopian student associations; an important early example was *The Lion Cub*, published in London from 1949. Pre- and post-publication censorship was institutionalised in the post-war period, and became particularly tight after the 1960 coup d'état against Haylä Səlasse. Controversial publications such as the student newspaper *Təgəl* ('Struggle') were harshly repressed. A number of student publications were launched starting from the 1950s and became pivotal organs of the student movement; the most important was *News and Views* (launched in 1951).

The radio also resumed service in the post-liberation years. It initially broadcasted four hours a day in Amharic, later diversifying its programmes and adding Arabic- and English-language services (Head 1968, Gartley 1997: 89). Somali, Afari and Tigrinya services were also added to counteract the anti-Ethiopian propaganda of Pan-Somali nationalists in Somalia and independentist propaganda in Eritrea (Meseret 2013: 123-125). The public address system, with loudspeakers in public places, continued to operate in Addis throughout the 1950s, as few people had their own radio sets (Head 1968, Gartley 1997: 90). Television services were launched in 1964, but for many decades had a very limited audience.

The 1960s are described by Shiferaw Bekele as 'the golden age' of Ethiopian culture (Shiferaw 2004: 11), and witnessed a flourishing of Ethiopian music (Mahmud Ahmād, Təlahun Gəssässä, Bəzunāš Bakḳälä and Mulatu Astatḳe) and the rise of Ethiopian modernism⁴⁴ in visual arts (Afəwārḳ Təkle, Skunder Boghossian and Gäbrä-Krəstos Dästa). The decade was also one of the most dynamic periods of Amharic literature. Poetic modernism was closely associated to the work of Solomon Däressa (b. 1939), who in 1969 published the first ever volume of Amharic poetry in blank verse (*Ləjjənnät*, 'Childhood')⁴⁵. Addis Abāba, now a big urban centre, had three major bookshops: Giannopoulos, Menno and Cosmos, all located around the centre.

⁴¹ Renamed National theatre under the Därg. For a history, see Mamitu (1987).

⁴² Bərhanu Zārihun, for example, recited in one of these plays in his government elementary school in Gondär.

⁴³ Bərhanu Zārihun, once again, started his journalistic career on *Techni-echo*, the journal of the Addis Abāba Technical School.

⁴⁴ 'Modernism' is the widely-accepted label to designate the aesthetic and literary features characterising 1960s Ethiopian music, literature and visual arts. For a problematisation of the term, see Elizabeth (2010b).

⁴⁵ Shiferaw defines Solomon 'the first modernist art critic of the country' (Shiferaw 2004: 32). He also published many articles of literary criticism, the most famous of which is a polemic against the Amharic 'dime novel' (Solomon Deressa 1969). He is fluent in English and French besides Amharic and has written poetry in all the three languages (Beer 1977). In 1975 he moved to the United States, where he is still based.

Some libraries in town were run by foreign cultural organisations: the United States Information Service (USIS), the British Council, the Alliance Ethio-Française and later the Soviet Union Cultural Centre. The UCAA quickly built up a good quality library, and the National Library also had a good Ethiopian collection (Shiferaw 2004: 34)⁴⁶. The opening in Addis of major international organisations such as the Economic Commission for Africa (1958) and the Organisation for African Unity (1963), together with the presence of many African scholarship students at the Haylä Səlasse I University, increased the cosmopolitan character of the city (Shiferaw 2004: 34). Educational achievements, though, were limited. By 1973, 93% of the population remained illiterate and primary education was available only to 12% of primary school-age children.

Authors

Ethiopia's 'modern' intellectuals⁴⁷

The developments described above were implemented under the triple slogans of modernisation, unity and state building. These were the three key elements of the political vision of 19th century emperors, Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868), Yohannəs IV (r. 1868-1889) and Mənilək II (r. 1889-1913) who saw in them effective ideological banners for their own power consolidation. Although they were 'often unconscious of the exact nature of the gulf which separated them from the countries of Europe', Ethiopian rulers were anxious to bridge it, usually for reasons of military strategy (Pankhurst 1964a: 317). Tewodros in particular went down in history as 'the first Ethiopian ruler, perhaps the first Ethiopian, with a project of modernity, a conception at least of Ethiopia as a developed state, along the lines of states in Europe' (Clapham 2006: 138). 'Modernity' in 19th century Ethiopia was eminently a political project of the rulers (Andreas 2013: 21). From the point of view of international diplomacy, projecting the image of modernisers and state-builders able to stabilise and develop the region gave the emperors legitimacy and leverage vis-à-vis foreign attempts to extend European influence in Ethiopia, and presented them as credible and like-minded allies and business partners. Domestically, modernisation offered the instruments to centralise imperial power on an unprecedented level, thanks to new military technologies, infrastructural development and notions of territorial sovereignty linked to the Western idea of statehood.

Those intellectuals that endorsed the role that modernity and modernisation had acquired within the imperial narrative rapidly rose to prominence in Ethiopia's government. Of course, they did not count for the totality of the late 19th and early 20th century Ethiopian

⁴⁶ On the development of Ethiopian libraries in the post-war period, see Wright (1961), Yitateku (1973) and Rita Pankhurst (1978).

⁴⁷ The term 'modern', 'modernity' and 'modernisation' are extensively discussed in chapter 3.

intellectual landscape. Church education and Quranic schools kept training more traditional types of scholars and numerous public figures remained cold towards the slogans of modernisation. But because educational facilities and cultural infrastructures were government-owned and located at the centre of the imperial power in Addis Abäba, the works of the intellectuals close to the government had an impact, circulation and preservation in time that intellectuals from peripheral areas or intellectuals not in line with government thought could not achieve. A limited number of sources are available to document the thought of those intellectuals who were, for reasons of class, ethnicity, religion or gender, distant from the imperial core of the state. Since modernity was in Ethiopia a top-down imperial project, it was through centralised state institutions that the country's 'modernisers' were shaped and trained. The Emperors presented modernity as one facet of imperial ideology, and so it came to be conceived by many early 20th century intellectuals, who by endorsing the monarchical system gained powerful positions within the government and a high visibility for their works. All the major intellectuals came to prominence through state institutions and through demonstrating at least a certain degree of loyalty to those institutions. Of course, there was also a genuinely idealistic aspect to the emperors' and intellectuals' commitment to modernisation, but political thought and cultural production were never independent from political opportunism and calculations. The relationship between intellectuals and emperors remained a problematic and uneasy one throughout the period under consideration.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the object of this thesis are the intellectuals from the centre of the Ethiopian state, and subsequent chapters will investigate their relationship with the monarchy and with the imperial narrative. The writers under analysis here were part of a very restricted literate elite. Many studied abroad, in Europe (France, Italy, UK, Switzerland, Belgium, Russia), the US or the Middle East (Egypt, Jerusalem), while some members of later generations had their schooling (or part thereof) in the Western-like educational institutions that gradually opened in Ethiopia. Many went through Ethiopian church instruction and combined traditional schooling with modern secular education. All of them spoke and wrote in Amharic, although not all of them were Amhara, and some spoke other Ethiopian languages besides Amharic. Gäbrä-Həywät Baykādañ was Tigrayan, Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam was Gurage, Täsfaye Gässässä had Gurage ancestry, Bäalu Gərma had an Oromo mother and an Indian father, Haddis Alämayähu had Oromo ancestors, Solomon Däressa was Oromo and Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən had an Oromo father and Amhara mother. Most of them were Orthodox Christians, while some converted to Catholicism (for example Käbbädä Mikael and Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam) and some to Protestantism (for example Amarä Mammo and Səbhat Gäbrä-Əgziabher). Although Amharic-language Muslim authors did emerge in the 1960s, the most visible Amharic-speaking intellectuals were all Christian. Class origins greatly varied; many rose to prominence from humble backgrounds via the patronage of the Emperor or other

powerful political figures, while some came from aristocratic families. Members of the second and (partly) third generation were often sons of famous intellectuals and politicians, and could make good use of the social capital accumulated by their fathers. From the point of view of gender, the intellectual environment was decidedly male-dominated. Female education had always been substantially lower than male education, and the disparity persisted in the 20th century. The first Western-style school for girls, the already-mentioned *Ətege Mänän School*, opened in 1930, but its objective was the training of good ‘modern’ wives, and the subjects taught were limited to house-keeping and ‘female’ crafts. Some newspaper articles discussed gender issues (Bahru 2002: 137), but these were very isolated contributions. In the post war period, two prominent female intellectuals were Sənəddu Gäbru (1916-2009), a high-level politician and playwright (Molvaer 1997b and 2009, Aboneh 2012: 2)⁴⁸, and Roman-Wärk Kassahun, a celebrated writer and radio broadcaster (Abebech 2001, Meseret 2013: 129), but their works, although popular at the time, never fully entered the canon.

Besides Ethiopian languages, all the intellectuals considered here spoke at least one European language, with French being the preferred language of the pre-1936 period, and English supplanting French in the post-1941 period. The vast majority of fictional (novels, poetry) and non-fictional (essays, newspaper articles) publications in Ethiopia were (and still are) in Amharic. While some Western-style schools and later the university taught students in French/English, and while there existed numerous European-language magazines and newspapers, European languages always remained secondary in role compared to the volume of Amharic-language output. Some intellectuals published bilingual works in French and Amharic (Afäwärk Gäbrä-Iyyäsus’s *Guide du voyageur en Abyssinie*) or trilingual works in English, French and Amharic (Käbbädä Mikael’s *Itopyanna Məəhrabawi Səlṭane/Ethiopia and Western civilisation/L’Éthiopie et la civilisation occidentale*). Some translated their Amharic-language works into English (Mängəstu Lämman translated into English his comedies *Tälfo Bäkise* and *Yalačča Gabəčča*). Many contributed to French-language or English-language newspapers (or bilingual newspapers with English or French sections). Some wrote some literary works directly in European languages, mostly English (for example Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam, Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən and Abbe Gubäñña). From 1942, Amharic became the country’s only official language, and it was prohibited to publish in Ethiopian languages other than Amharic (Mekuria 1994: 99). Sahlä-Səlasse’s Gurage-language novel *Ye-Shinega Qaya* was perhaps the only text published by the core group of Addis Abäba intellectuals in an indigenous language other than Amharic.

⁴⁸ She contributed articles for, among other newspapers, the *Ethiopia Observer*, and was the only woman to be awarded the Haylä Səlasse I literary prize. A collection of her plays and poems was published in 1964/65 under the title *YäLəbbe Məşhaf* (‘Book of my heart’).

All of the intellectuals analysed in this thesis were based in Addis Abäba, although often travelled abroad for their diplomatic duties as politicians, or relocated to provincial outposts if appointed administrators or governors. Regardless of their different family backgrounds, most took up jobs in Addis Abäba; some held prominent positions in Haylä Səlasse's government, some worked in the public sector. Virtually no one worked outside of public institutions, and the private sector was, at any rate, extremely small for the whole period under investigation. Their books were all printed in the capital, where the few and only publishing facilities were located⁴⁹. Despite generational differences, the cultural environment where the intellectuals operated was remarkably compact. They all knew each other, were familiar with each other's works and often reviewed each other's works on national newspapers and literary magazines. Some attended school together (Taddässä Libän and Mängəstu Lämma, for example, met while students at the Täfäri Mäkönnən School), some worked together (Tesfaye Gässässä and Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən were colleagues at the Haylä Səlasse I Theatre), and some cite each other as friends (Daññaččaw Wärku and Mängəstu Lämma). The younger generations studied the works of the older generations at school. There is a high level of intertextuality among novels and plays written up to 1974, with some themes, plot devices, stylistic techniques and characters' portrayals recurring over and over again – the most glaring example is the literary trope of the intellectual coming home from abroad, a theme embraced and elaborated upon by a majority of writers.

Four generations of intellectuals

No scholarly consensus exists about the periodisation of 20th century Ethiopian intellectual history. Identifying the first exponents of the new intellectual class described above is quite easy, as they were the first to be exposed to Western education and to operate in the international political environment defined by statehood. After the 'pioneers', though, existing attempts at periodising the country's intellectual history are unsystematic and self-contradictory⁵⁰. This thesis identifies, in the period 1896-1974, four generations of intellectuals. This classification is based on age, formation and employment, but also draws from the perceptions of the intellectuals themselves. The generational distinctions were sometimes biological, with fathers and sons occupying successive generational slots. But in addition to age, generational identity was also based on shared sets of cultural viewpoints. Both older intellectuals and younger intellectuals debated what they perceived to be the cultural and

⁴⁹ Some exceptions were Gäbrä-Həywät Baykädañ's 1912 *Ate Məniləkənnə Ityopya*, printed in Asmara; Afəwərķ Gäbrä-Iyyäsus's 1908 *Ləbb Wälləd Tarik*, first printed in Rome; and Gərmaččaw Täklä-Hawaryat's 1948/49 *Araya*, first printed in Asmara.

⁵⁰ Clarke, for example, considers the Japanisers and Young Ethiopians (about whom more below) one and the same group (2011: 7), but cites as exponent of this group Həruy who, born in 1878, was hardly 'young' at the peak of the Japanising impetus in the late 1920s and 1930s.

ideological differences between generations, reflected upon them in their theoretical outputs and, as we shall see, extensively dramatised them in their literary works⁵¹.

The first generation

The first generation comprises thinkers born in the 1860s, 1870s or 1880s, whose formative years were under Mənilək II and whose main period of intellectual and political activity were the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s. Their biographies have been extensively studied by Bahru, who refers to them as Ethiopia's 'pioneers of change'. The most prominent members of this generation, and the ones who are most often referred to in this thesis, are Gäbrä-Həywät Baykädañ (1886-1919), Wərķenäh Əšäte (1865-1952), Afäwärķ Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, (1868-1947), Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam (1884-1977), and Həruy Wäldä-Selasse (1878-1938). They produced more non-fictional than fictional works, and the only prolific author from the literary point of view was Həruy. Their relationship with the imperial palace was not always an easy one: Afäwärķ and Gäbrä-Həywät, for example, entered into conflict with Empress Taytu, and Täklä-Hawaryat often clashed with Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse. Despite this, exponents of the first generation came to occupy very high positions in the government, and all had careers at the highest levels of the Ethiopian state.

Transitional figures between the first and the second generation

Those born in the 1890s can be considered bridge figures between the first and the second generation. They went through church education and their formative period was under Mənilək, but many also attended the Mənilək II School, including high-calibre political figures such as Mäkonnen Əndalkačäw, the future *Ras Bitwädäd* and Prime Minister; Əmru Haylä-Səlasse, the future *Ras* (1892-1980); Iyasu, who would rule Ethiopia from 1910 to 1916 (born 1897)⁵²; and Täfäri himself (born 1892). Unlike first-generation intellectuals, who were almost exclusively active before the Italian war, some of these transitional figures came to prominence as writers and politicians only after the liberation; examples are Mäkonnen Əndalkačäw (1891-1963) and Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (1894-1981), whose written production is almost entirely post-1941.

⁵¹ My classification draws, among others, from Mängəstu Lamma's 1984 article on 'The Ethiopian Playwright', which distinguishes between 'the Pioneers, the Middle Generation and the Third Generation' (first, second and third generation in this thesis)

⁵² While history books generally consider 1913 and 1916 as, respectively, the beginning and the end of Iyasu's reign, this is, for Smidt, 'a post-Iyasu anachronistic invention; this was based on his successor's version of historiography aimed at shortening this period to a minimum, thus underlining the purely transitional character of *Lij* Iyasu's reign' (Smidt 2014: 203). Iyasu ruled, in fact, from 1910 to 1916. In the first three years Iyasu ruled in the name of Mənilək II, who after a series of strokes was permanently incapacitated and died in 1913.

The Italian occupation in the periodisation of Ethiopian intellectual history

The 1936-1941 fascist occupation is used to periodise the vast majority of surveys of Ethiopian history and intellectual history (for example, Meseret 2013), based on the conclusion, as argued by Shiferaw Bekele, that ‘there was a sharp generational gap between the pre- and post-war intellectuals’ (1994: 110). Literary scholars also share the view that the fascist invasion was a turning point in the intellectual history of the country (Ricard 2004: 55, Kane 1975: 12, Mantel-Niecko 1985: 315). Gérard, for example, claims that the occupation ‘was responsible for wide-ranging changes in creative literature’ (1971: 298) and produced a conservative backlash in the writers’ ideology. He characterises antebellum writers as ‘change-oriented’ (1971: 303) and post-war writers as ‘a conservative group of feudal lords and high clergy who were trying to counteract the modernizing and democratic forces at work in political circles’ (1971: 303). Bahru put forward a similar argument. For him, ‘the Fascist invasion of 1935 put a rude and abrupt end to [the pre-war] fascinating experiment in social and political reform’ (2002: 210). In his analysis, ‘the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-1941 could be said to have brought about the denouement of the Ethiopian intellectuals who had argued and worked for reform in the decades before the war’ (1993: 271). Bahru contends, in particular, that the educated elite of the post-1941 period ‘saw its mission as one of loyal and dedicated service rather than engagement in social and political critique’ (2002: 211), an argument he again repeats in his latest scholarly work (2014: 36).

This argument is based on the assumption that the liquidation of many educated Ethiopians at the hands of the Italians created a ‘generational gap in the intellectual and political history of the country’ (Bahru 2002: 211). The idea of a ‘missing generation’ is widespread in historiography (see for example, Campbell 2010: 447), but scholars who took the time to investigate this claim found little evidence in its favour. Clapham admits that there was a ‘gap in education and recruitment’ (1969: 20) since during the occupation no Ethiopian received advanced education or worked in high-level government posts, but on the notion of the ‘missing generation’ he draws the following conclusion:

It is often asserted that the Italians systematically liquidated educated Ethiopians, so that there were practically none to help run the government in 1941. This change needs to be examined carefully. [...] Reports of wholesale massacre of the educated are greatly exaggerated (Clapham 1969: 19-20).

Clapham provides figures, based on the *Nägarit Gazeṭa* (the official gazette) and other government records, which show that before the Italian occupation more than 200 Ethiopians received advanced education abroad, 30 (15%) of whom died in the war or were killed by the Italians. Perhaps the most comprehensive survey of all the Ethiopians who studied abroad

before the Italian invasion and their fate during the occupation is a 50-pages article published by Pankhurst in 1962. His figures are very close to Clapham's: he lists the names of over 200 students, of which a total of 25 died at the hands of the Italians or as a consequence of the occupation. This figure is much lower than the one proposed by Teshome G. Wagaw, who argues that 'about 75 per cent of those who had some modern education were wiped out during the years of occupation' (1979: 48). And in fact, the majority of intellectuals that Bahru mentions as part of the second generation of the 'pioneers of change' (2002: 79-98) did survive the occupation and went on to take up important government roles in Haylä Səlasse's post-liberation cabinets. Greenfield calculates that 'of the fifty that were still alive in 1964 [23 years after liberation], thirty held high-government positions – assistant minister, vice minister, minister of state, minister or ambassador' (1965: 316). Without underestimating the destructive effects of the Italian massacres, the argument that the post-war intellectual climate was dreary because of the elimination of educated elites is not sustained by available evidence. A good number, and most likely the majority, of pre-war elites were still alive and active after the war. The second generation of Ethiopian intellectuals was not terminated in 1936-1941, but continued well into the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, as shown by the dates of birth and death of second-generation exponents in Bahru's own 2002 study.

Bahru attributes the putative change between the 'intellectual vibrancy that prevailed in the 1920s' (2014: 36) and the 'drab intellectual climate that marked the postwar period' (2002: 211) to a change in the intellectuals' conception of their own function, from social critique to uncritical adulation of the Emperor. However, he does not discuss why intellectuals he includes among the second generation of the 'pioneers of change' allegedly changed their outlook so dramatically in the post-war period. Furthermore, the adulation of Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse did not start in 1941 but was also common in pre-1936 publications, as a quick glance to the pages of *Bərhanənnā Səlam* immediately shows. This thesis argues that the elements of continuity between pre-war and post-war political ideas and behaviours far outweigh the differences, and finds no traces of the alleged 'conservative backlash' in the intellectuals' political thought. The emperor's personality cult did become more emphatic in the post-war years, but this is due to a change in the political environment and a tightening of censorship more than to changes in the intellectuals' ideology and political outlook. Similarly, this thesis does not endorse the view that the second generation of intellectuals became a 'lost' or prematurely truncated generation as a consequence of the Italian mass killings. Some members of the second generation were executed by the Italians, but the age group extended its influence well after the Italian occupation. The destructive effects of the occupation impacted to a much more significant degree the members of the first generation, none of whose exponents was anymore active in Ethiopia's public life in the post-liberation years. Of course, at a personal level the occupation

was a decisive moment in the biography of many intellectuals; the next paragraph offers an analysis of its impact on the intellectuals' lives and careers.

The second generation

The second generation comprises intellectuals born around the 1900s and 1910s. Some of them were active before the Italian occupation, some afterwards, in the 1940s and 1950s. Their formative period was during the regency of Täfäri, and the most influential educational institution was for them the Täfäri Mäkonnen School, although some, in line with their predecessors, attended the Mənilək II School (Wasane and Näsibu Zamanuel and the future *Şähafe Təəzaz* Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs) or graduated from Raguel (Yoftahe Nəguse and Mäkonnen Habtä-Wäld). For their secondary education, though, they were mostly sent overseas, and this is perhaps the generation that was more extensively trained abroad. Before 1936, typical jobs that both first- and second-generation intellectuals took up were related to the management of the Djibouti-Addis Abäba Franco-Ethiopian railway, the running of a special judiciary court to settle disputes between Ethiopians and foreigners, the direction of various municipalities (the most important being Addis and Dəre Dawa) and the administration of various ministries. Just like the first cohort of intellectuals, members of the second generation rose to very high ministerial positions in the government, particularly after the Italian occupation.

In the pre-1936 period, the second generation of Ethiopian intellectuals was commonly referred to as the generation of the 'Young Ethiopians'. The name was a term given by foreign observers, who saw similarities between the foreign-educated Ethiopian youth and the movements of the Young Turks or the Young Egypt abroad; the label was never systematically used by the people so designated. While the first generation of intellectuals has been adequately studied, little research has been conducted on the Young Ethiopians, and researching their political thought is complicated by the fact that, except for few occasional contributions to *Bərhanəna Sälām* (for example, those by Mikael Täsämma) and few university dissertations (for example, that by Tädla Haile at the University of Antwerp) they left no substantial written works. As a result, most information available on them comes from foreign diplomatic sources and European travelogues.

Reports about groups of young, Europeanised Ethiopians surfaced in European accounts as early as 1901 and became particularly frequent in the 1920s and early 1930s (Pankhurst 2010: 123). The Young Ethiopians, as described by European sources, were fluent in one or more European languages, had studied and travelled abroad and had adopted Western manners and fashion. France was the main country of destination for Ethiopian students, and French the most widespread foreign language (D'Esme 1928: 122). The Young Ethiopians imported drinks,

clothes and furniture items from Europe, read foreign newspapers and gave their children foreign names. Greenfield reports that they ‘congregated in a tin-roofed building in Addis Ababa and discussed the central government’s attempts at reform’ (1965: 315). Some of them, following their experiences abroad or their studies in mission schools, converted to Catholicism or (less often) Protestantism. The group included many Eritreans, who had relocated to Addis from Italian-colonised Eritrea (Marcus 1987: 137-138). As a group, the Young Ethiopians

were largely advocates of modernization as well as committed nationalists, opposed to colonialist pressures, and indignant at racial discrimination as practiced by the local European community in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. [They] were particularly conscious of the discrepancy in wealth and power between their country and the industrialized West. They saw that Ethiopia – like other old and traditional countries outside Europe – was being inexorably outstripped by the Industrialized Powers of Europe (Pankhurst 2010: 138).

Perhaps the most celebrated representative of this group of Westernised Ethiopians was *Däjazmač* Näsibu Zamanuel (1893/94-1936), whose palace and lifestyle are vividly described in his daughter Martha’s memoir (2005). Martha credits her father with being the creator of the ‘movement of the Young Ethiopians’ (2005: 29). Although this is most likely an overstatement (not to mention that it is dubious whether the Young Ethiopians ever constituted a ‘movement’), Näsibu was undoubtedly one of the Young Ethiopians’ most visible figures (Marcus 1987: 139), if not their patron, considering his slightly older age, and his influential political position as mayor of Addis Abäba (from 1921), provincial governor and, later, director-general in the Ministry of Defence. Frequently categorised by foreign sources as a Young Ethiopian was Bäšaweräd Habtä-Wäld (1895-1937), a Šäwan who had studied in the United States and converted to Catholicism; he generated controversies for his anti-French policies as director of the municipality of Däre Dawa and, removed from that post, was later appointed director-general of the Ministry of Finance. Kidanä-Maryam Abärra, native of Adwa, French-educated and frequent contributor to *Bərhanənnä Sälam*, was director-general in the Ministry of Education in the 1930s and is credited with being one of the Young Ethiopians’ main social organisers. Prominent among the Young Ethiopians were Hərüy Wäldä-Səllase’s two sons, Fäḳädä-Səllase (1907/8-1937) and Sirak (1910/11-c.1982), and Wärḳəṇäh Əšäte’s two sons Yosef (d.1937) and Binyam (d.1937). Fäḳädä-Səllase (also known as George) and Sirak received some church education, and then attended the Victoria College in Alexandria, Egypt, before continuing their studies in England, Fäḳädä-Səllase at Cambridge and Sirak at Oxford. Yosef and Binyam were similarly educated in England, and both studied engineering at Loughborough College. Also part of the Young Ethiopians was Dawit Ogbazgi, educated in Lebanon and press officer during the Italo-Ethiopian war. Ayyälä Gäbrä, a Catholic convert, worked as station master on the Addis Abäba-Djibouti railway, then as a director of customs in

Dəre Dawa; in 1932 was nominated chief judge of the special court, and later became director of the municipality of Addis Abāba. Slightly older than the other Young Ethiopians but often cited as one of them, Mäkonnen Habtä-Wäld (1894-1960) was an extremely influential figure in the 1930s, working as director-general in the Ministry of Finance under Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam. Yəлма Däressa (1907-1979), an LSE graduate, was the son of *Blatta* Däressa Amänte, an Oromo nobleman from Wälläga and one of the most prolific contributors to *Bərhanənnā Sälām*. Lastly, Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (1901-1976), born in Addis Abāba, received church education before joining the Mənilək II School; he worked as a clerk and interpreter in various governmental institutions before becoming secretary-general in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Həruy Wäldä-Selasse, and was then promoted in 1934 to the extremely influential position of director-general of the Ministry of Pen.

Other important members of this generation seemed not to have been closely associated with the core group of Young Ethiopians. One of them was Gäbrä-Həywät's son Ašäbər (b.1909), who studied law in Switzerland and authored a book titled *La vérité sur l'Éthiopie révélée après le couronnement du Roi des Rois* ('The truth about Ethiopia revealed after the crowning of the King of Kings'). Tädla Haile (d.1936) studied in Belgium and, upon his return, was assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and later appointed Ethiopian consul in Asmara. Mikael Täsämma, a native of Adwa, was educated in Rome, where he was not allowed to defend his doctoral thesis in political science as it was deemed too anti-Italian; he was an active contributor to *Bərhanənnā Sälām* and briefly worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the Italian invasion⁵³. *Blatten Geta* Wäldä-Maryam Ayyälä, the 'doyen' of a fairly numerous and compact group of young Catholic intellectuals (Bahru 2002: 96), was director-general of the Ministry of Interior in 1929 and later Ethiopian minister in Paris and Geneva. Bərhanä Markos, another Catholic, worked at the Franco-Ethiopian railway, was then appointed director-general of posts, telephones and telegraphs, and was later sent to Turkey as Ethiopian *chargé d'affaires*⁵⁴. Loränso Taəzaz (1900-1947), an Eritrean, studied law in Montpellier, served as adviser to the special court and was later appointed to the Anglo-Ethiopian Boundary Commission. Mäkonnen Dästa (1910-1966) studied in Lebanon and was then sent to the USA, where he studied medicine at Harvard University, later switching to anthropology. Another US graduate was Mälaku Bäyyan (1900-1940) who grew very close to the African-American community and became a famous Pan-Africanist activist; he was militant against the Italian occupation, raising support for Ethiopia via his Ethiopian World Federation and his newspaper *Voice of Ethiopia*⁵⁵. Sənəddu Gäbru (1916-2009), daughter of *Kantiba* Gäbru⁵⁶, was educated at

⁵³ For more information on his economic thought, see Alemayehu (2003).

⁵⁴ For a profile, see Mickaél (2009).

⁵⁵ For a profile, see Scott (1972).

⁵⁶ More information on *Käntiba* Gäbru Dästa is to be found in Bairu (1969) and Bahru (2002: 42-47)

the Swedish Mission School in Addis, then studied in France and Switzerland, and started teaching in Ethiopia upon her return in 1933. Also part of this generation was Tāklā-Šadək Mäkwəriya (1913-2000), who would rise in the post-war period to become one of the most prolific historians of Ethiopia⁵⁷.

Sources from the pre-Italian occupation period suggest that the Young Ethiopians had a strong sense of generational identity⁵⁸. Hungarian journalist Ledislas Farago, for example, reports the following words by Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs, then director-general of the Ministry of Pen:

At last we have reached the point when we have officials who have the ability to govern the country in the European method, instead of oligarchies. I am convinced that we shall now develop more rapidly (quoted in Farago 1935: 70).

However, Wäldä-Giyorgis is worried that the traditional elites are still very influential:

The Conservatives rule the country, and conservative here means backward and pitiless. We of the younger generation are the friends of progress and humanism, while they are its enemies! And we do not want to work in vain! (quoted in Farago 1935: 70-71).

An even more striking expression of generational identity was formulated by Yəlma Däressa:

We young Ethiopians are in duty bound to our country. We are the bridge that the Emperor has thrown across to European culture. It goes almost without saying that we are sent to finish our education in Europe or North Africa. Ethiopian students are to be found in all the important universities of the world. The Foreign Minister's [i.e. Həruy Wäldä-Selasse's] sons studied in Oxford and Cambridge. [...] This growing generation will complete the civilisation of our country (quoted in Farago 1935: 38).

At the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war, such group consciousness was on the verge of becoming more stably institutionalised. In 1930, the American Minister James Loder Park

⁵⁷ In 1945/46 he published the first volume of his *magnum opus* on Ethiopian history, which was to cover from Aksumite times up to the reign of Tewodros. He eventually extended the project to include Yohannəs's and Mənilək's reigns. For a profile, see Beletu (1992) and Ricci (1992).

⁵⁸ Rarely was this sense of generational identity expressed more scathingly than by Iyasu himself, who, although slightly older than other Young Ethiopians, fully anticipated, while in power, some of the subversive attitudes that the Young Ethiopians would become famous for. Brash, unruly and impulsive, Iyasu was also extremely irreverent towards his grandfather Mənilək's 'old guard', whom he referred to as 'my grandfather's fattened sheep'. He started promoting 'younger and more progressive persons' (Bahru 1991: 125), and treated the old elites with contempt, reportedly telling them that 'when I travel with my escort of young people to visit and conquer new areas, you should not follow me without my permission. You can no longer keep up with us: you have grown old and fat. In your own time you have followed my grandfather and conquered territories. Now, however, you cannot run and escape nor pursue and capture. Stay back and execute your duties there' (quoted in Bahru 1991: 123).

reported that the Young Ethiopians were planning to organise a club ‘to provide social recreation more in accord with their acquired foreign tastes’ (quoted in Bahru 2002: 196). Although the main emphasis seemed to have been on entertainment, Park reflected that the club ‘may some day become a factor of some potency in Ethiopian affairs, by weight of organized group opinion’ (quoted in Bahru 2002: 196). Greenfield agrees that the attempt to establish clubs was ultimately aimed at forming a political pressure group (1965: 315), although it is dubious whether the Emperor would have allowed a similar development, considering that a newspaper founded by the Young Ethiopians in the early 1930s to represent their views, *Voix éthiopienne*, was closed on imperial orders after the first issue.

Many Young Ethiopians worked in the public administration, but their relationship with the imperial bureaucracy was, in many cases, strained. ‘Most foreign commentators’, observes Pankhurst, ‘differentiated between the Young Ethiopians and the Ethiopian Government – and in some cases even regarded the former as the critics of latter’ (2010: 130). Yälma’s words quoted above show that at least some Young Ethiopians fully embraced Täfäri’s political vision, but there was also widespread discontent. Many resented not being given higher responsibilities in the government and not receiving salaries to match their qualifications. The correspondence of the American consul, Addison Southard, offers some interesting insights on these political tensions. The top ranks in the government, Southard reports in 1934, were generally occupied by ‘old-fashioned fellows’, aristocratic noblemen who looked with suspicion at Western education (quoted in Clarke 2011: 17). The Young Ethiopians usually served in lower administrative ranks than their older aristocratic bosses. Generational tensions criss-crossed class loyalties: the Young Ethiopians who had studied abroad were generally of higher social extraction than those who had studied in foreign schools locally, and, because of their upper-class origin, the former were not resented by Ethiopian aristocratic elders as much as the latter (Marcus 1987: 93). Haylä Sälasse was often at the centre of these conflicts. Closer, in terms of upbringing and political vision, to the Young Ethiopians, the Emperor nevertheless had to interact much more often with senior government officials. Southard suggests that the Emperor skilfully played one faction against each other, manipulating jealousy to spur each group to ever-bigger manifestations of loyalty. As an example of this policy, which would become systematic after the war (Marcus 1994: 166), was the restructuring of the Ministry of War in 1931. Näsibu Zamanuel, the leading figure of the Young Ethiopians, was nominated director, while Bärü Mäniläk, one of Mäniläk’s protégés ‘of antiquated ideas’ (Marcus 1987: 115), was appointed minister. Bärü was born at Mäniläk’s court from a minor functionary and a servant girl, and was later adopted by Mäniläk and raised as an aristocrat; his promotion as Minister of War exemplifies Täfäri’s common strategy to advance people that owed everything to the monarchy and had limited horizontal social capital. The vertical dependence from the Emperor

was also feature of the Young Ethiopians, who ‘felt quite powerless without the emperor’ (Greenfield 1965: 315).

In the competition for the Emperor’s favour, both the Young Ethiopians and the old aristocratic elites resented the presence in Ethiopia of foreign advisors, contractors and traders, who were in many cases paid higher salaries than locals. Of the two political groupings, though, the Young Ethiopians, as a newly-emerging class, could count on less accumulated social capital, and felt more at risk to be side-lined by foreign competitors. Their relationship with foreigners working in Ethiopia was therefore very tense. At the same time, the Young Ethiopians were also subject to pressures from the inside. Europhiles in many regards, they were questioned in their integrity by their elders, and their manifestations of patriotism were partly instigated by the wish to prove they could be trusted with defending Ethiopia’s interests over those of foreigners. Those youth who had converted to Catholicism were the object of additional mistrust and highly resented by the Orthodox establishment. As a result of these external and internal strains, the Young Ethiopians’ hostility towards outsiders was so pronounced that foreign observers, no doubt offended in their feelings of racial superiority, often accused them of xenophobia. Two successive British Ministers to Ethiopia, first Charles Bentinck in 1927 and then Sir Sydney Barton in 1928-29, repeat the accusation. Both were condescendingly unsympathetic towards Ethiopian people and they felt outraged that the Ethiopians were not inclined to conform to their idea of racial hierarchies. Bentinck complained of the situation in the following terms:

As in China and India, so in Abyssinia, there is a small section of the younger generation which has received a smattering of Western education. These young men are satisfied with having scratched the surface and think they know enough. In the town of Addis Ababa they consort in terms of equality with the riff-raff of Armenia and Greece, and in some cases France and Russia. They get the idea that they are not only the equal, but the superior of the white man, and they strive to show this in various forms: refusing to pay salaries due to Europeans for services rendered, and by throwing them penniless into the streets or using personal violence against their persons and properties, etc. (quoted in Bahru 2002: 195).

Such attitudes on the part of Westerners certainly fuelled the Young Ethiopians’ alleged xenophobia, which therefore could be seen, at least in part, as a counter-reaction to Western racism. French traveller Henry De Monfreid draws attention to the racial segregation that Ethiopian students like Bāšawērād were subjected to in the USA, and further reports the case of one of Mənilək’s official government envoys being forbidden from dining at the captain’s table

when traveling on a British steamer (1933: 220-224)⁵⁹. The December 1925 agreement between the Italians and the British, whereby the British recognised Italy's exclusive economic influence in Western Ethiopia and Italy supported the British project to build a dam on Lake Tana in Northern Ethiopia, spurred waves of turmoil in Addis Abäba. The Young Ethiopians were reportedly at the forefront of the protests. According to British traveller Charles Rey, 'foreigners were stopped in their cars and allowed to drive on only if they were certified to be neither British nor Italian' (quoted in Bahru 2002: 195). A similar instance of unrest happened in 1933, when several Young Ethiopians were thrown out of a Greek coffee shop, the Tabaris Café. The motivations of the café owner are unclear, but the expelled evidently felt they were being discriminated against. They returned six days later to smash up the place in reprisal, causing the intervention of the police and the closure of the café. In the incident were reportedly involved all the major figures associated to the Young Ethiopians: Kidanä-Maryam Abärra, Fäkäda-Sellase Həruy, Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (the politician), Mäkonnen Habtä-Wäld, Bäšahweräd Häbtä-Wäld and Ayyälä Gäbrä.

The Young Ethiopians' hostility towards what they saw as foreign economic and political encroachment proved well-founded when the Italians invaded Ethiopia in 1935. Dissatisfaction with Haylä Səlasse's rule grew as the Italian war was approaching, and gained even more momentum after the Emperor abandoned the country in 1936 after his army was defeated by Italian forces at the battle of Mayčäw. The occupation had undoubtedly a traumatic impact on the lives of all the intellectuals considered here. Some died in the war: Tädla Haile was killed on the battlefield in 1936, fighting under *Ras Səyum Mängäša*. Many went into exile with the Emperor via Djibouti (Mäkonnen Əndalkačäw, Näsibu Zamanuel, Täklä-Hawaryat and his son Gərmaččäw, Həruy, Bäšaweräd, the soon-to-be *Şəhəfe Təəzaz* Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs). Some fled via other unofficial routes, for example Yoftahe Nəguse, who escaped to British Sudan disguised as a priest. Näsibu Zamanuel died in Switzerland in October 1936 of lung failure, after having unsuccessfully led the Ethiopian diplomatic delegation at the League of Nations. Many stayed behind in Ethiopia and, after the Italians conquered Addis Abäba, organised the armed resistance movement *Ṭəḳur Anbäsa* ('Black Lions'). Top members of the Black Lions were Dr Aləmwärk Bəyänna, a British-trained veterinarian; Lieutenant-Colonel Bälay Haylä-Ab, an Eritrean-born graduate of the Holäta military academy; Lieutenant-Colonel Kəfle Näsibu (c.1913-1937), son of Näsibu Zamanuel, first trained at the elite French military academy of Saint Cyr and later at Holäta; and the aforementioned Fäkäda-Səllase Həruy, Yəlma Däressa, Yosef Wärkənäh and Binyam Wärkənäh. Sənəddu Gäbru also joined the resistance. After they surrendered to Italian authorities in December 1936, many Black Lions were allowed to live in Addis Abäba under close surveillance.

⁵⁹ Wärkənäh suffered a similar experience while travelling by ship from London to New York (Garretson 2012: 156).

Gərmaččaw Täklä-Hawaryat and Bäšaweräd, initially members of the Emperor's leaving party, decided to re-enter Ethiopia shortly afterwards, and suffered the consequences. In the brutal crackdown following the 1937 failed plot to kill Italian viceroy Rodolfo Graziani, the former members of the Black Lions Yosef Wärkənäh, Binyam Wärkənäh, Fäḳädä-Səllase Həruy, Kəfle Nəsibu and Bälay Haylä-Ab were all rounded up and summarily executed. The conspirators who intended to assassinate Graziani were, once again, exponents of the new class of French- and/or English-speaking Western-educated youth: Səbhat Ṭərunäh (1901/2-1937) was a graduate of the Täfäri Mäkonnen School and language teacher at the German Hermannsburg Mission; Mogäs Asgädom (1911/12-1937) and Abrəha Däboč (1913-1937) escaped to Addis from Italian-colonised Eritrea and studied first at the Mənilək II and later at the Täfäri Mäkonnen School; Simeon Adäfrəs (1912-1937) attended the Catholic Mission School in Harär and later the Alliance Française in Addis; Bäšaweräd too was involved in the conspiracy. All of the conspirators were captured and executed in the aftermath of the assassination attempt⁶⁰.

In the crackdown following the failed attack against Graziani, Gərmaččaw was arrested and interned in Italy for 7 years. Haddis Alämayähu, *Ras* Əmru Haylä-Səllase, *Käntiba* Gäbru Dästa, Sənəddu Gäbru and Yəлма Däressa were also interned in Italy for the duration of the occupation⁶¹. Although Ethiopia was liberated in 1941, some had to wait until the end of the Second World War to be freed and allowed to travel back home. Others, like Mikael Täsämma and Alämwärk Bəyänna, were interned at the Dänane (Dhanaane in Somali) prisoner camp in Italian Somaliland. Some openly shifted their favour to the Italians and became apologists of the new regime; the most famous case is that of Afäwärk Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, but the Italians also received support from *Blatten Geta* Wäldä-Maryam Ayyälä, Bərhanä Marḳos and other Catholics. Some of those who remained in Addis Abäba had to compromise and collaborated, reluctantly or not, with the Italians: Käbbädä Mikael worked as a broadcaster, while journalist Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs was forced to contribute to Italian propaganda newspapers.

The Westernised youth described by foreign sources as the unruly and boisterous Young Ethiopians of the 1920s and 1930s were not so young or so unruly after the liberation, when Haylä Səllase's increased power demanded absolute loyalty and obedience. As the aristocracy was gradually divested of power, the incorporation of the Western-educated class into the imperial bureaucracy gained a new pace. Just like before the Italian occupation, many exponents of the second generation readily contributed to Haylä Səllase's centralising policies, and rose to high positions in the government. Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs, in his role as Minister of Pen (1941-1955) was perhaps the most influential politician of the post-liberation

⁶⁰ Extensive information on the conspiracy, including the biographies of the plotters, is to be found in Campbell (2010).

⁶¹ The islands of Asinara and Lipari were the most common imprisonment locations.

order. Yəlmä Däressa rose to the rank of Minister of Finance (1941-1949) and later of Commerce (1949-1953). Sənəddu Gäbru became directress of the *Ətege Mänän* School, was a deputy in Ethiopia's first parliament (1956-1960), Vice-President of the Second Parliament (1960-1962) and Secretary-General of the Minister of Social Affairs. Bərhanä Markos was nominated director of the Ministry of Posts. Mäkonnen Dästa was appointed Minister of Education in 1941. Mäkonnen Habtä-Wäld (1894-1960) was Minister of Agriculture (1942-1949), of Commerce (1943-1949), and of Finance (1949-1958); his two younger brothers Akaläwärk (d.1974) and Aklilu (1912-1974), educated in France, also took up important ministerial roles. Kəfle Ərgätu (1906-1974), graduate of the Saint Cyr military academy, had a career in the Ministry of Public Security and later of the Interior. Kidanä-Maryam Abärä initially fell into disgrace for his association with Tigrayan nationalism, but was later pardoned and served in high-end ministerial jobs.

Just like before the war, dissent was effectively suppressed and attempts at officialising a corporate identity were blocked as dangerous. Alämwärk Bəyänna, who in the post-war period founded an association called *YäWätatočč Mənč* ('Fountain of Youth') comprising over one hundred young Ethiopians, was the object of an assassination attempt, which caused him to abandon all political activities (Bahru 2014: 52). The *Ḳäčäne Club*⁶², an informal discussion forum for returnees from abroad set up towards the end of the 1950s by Gärmame Nəway, was also closed as a result of internal discord and government pressures (Tekeste Melake 1994: 288-289, Bahru 2014: 56). The main opposition to Haylä Səlasse's rule in the years following the liberation came from military men, both former leaders of the armed resistance against the Italian occupation, who thought that Haylä Səlasse's rule had lost legitimacy when the Emperor fled from Ethiopia in 1936, and foreign-educated military officials, such as in the case of the 1960 coup, planned by Gärmame Nəway with the help of his brother Mängəstu, Head of the Imperial Bodyguards. *Blatta Takkälä Wäldä-Hawaryat*, a Raguel alumnus and director of the municipality of Addis Abäba at the outbreak of the war with Italy, became one of the fiercest and most outspoken critics of Haylä Səlasse's government in the post-1941 years. He served in high positions in the post-liberation cabinet, but was jailed three times (1942-45, 1947-54, 1961-66) for plotting against Haylä Səlasse, and was shot to death in 1969 in the fighting ensued from his latest conspiracy to kill the Emperor. The strategy of relocating to foreign ambassadorial posts people who had fallen out of favour, already well-established in the pre-war period, continued in earnest in the post-war years. After a brief spell as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1941-42) and then of Posts (1942-43), Loränsö Taəzaz was sent abroad to work in the

⁶² The name derived from the location of the house where the educated elite met up. The house belonged to *Ras Əmru Haylä-Səlasse*, who left it to the intellectuals when he relocated to India as Ethiopian Ambassador. The club never got legal recognition and its members were not registered. It was rather an unofficial meeting place; it hosted a small library and facilities for games. Games constituted a good part of the activities of the attendees, to the frustration of the more politically-engaged intellectuals (Tekeste Melake 1994: 288-289).

Moscow embassy on the instigation of *Šāhāfe Təəzaz Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs*, who saw him as a rival.

Many dissatisfied with the government retired to a low-profile private life. Wärqənäh Əšäte and Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam, both part of the first generation, followed this route, but some members of the second generation also chose this option. Mikael Täsämma worked in Ministry of Justice, but retired from government service in 1947/8. Sirak Həruy worked as secretary-general of the Ministry of Interior, but often found himself in disagreement with his co-workers, including Mäkönnən Əndalkaçäw, mostly for reasons of work ethics. He asked to be released from government duties and worked as a translator from English to Amharic for an Amharic-language newspaper published by the British, on which he published the serialised translation of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*. After this, he lived off his family's land, with no regular income and no proper occupation, until his death in the early 1980s.

The towering figures of the post-liberation cultural scene were four: the already-mentioned Mäkönnən Əndalkaçäw and *Blatta Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs*, plus the younger Gərmaččäw Takla-Hawaryat (1915-1987) and Käbbädä Mikael (1914-1998). Their fictional works became school textbooks for the teaching of Amharic, and were very well-known by all those who attended school in the post-liberation decades. As detailed in the next paragraph, many intellectuals of the third generation reported to be very familiar with, and to have been inspired by, the literary output of these four writers. Another key figure of the second generation of intellectuals was Haddis Alämayähu (1910-2003). His date of birth, formation, experiences during the Italian occupation, and the high-profile roles he performed in the government make him a rather typical exponent of the second generation; yet, he is most commonly remembered for a novel, *Fəḳər Əskä Mäḳabər* ('Love unto the grave') published in 1965/6, whose form and content are highly influenced, like third-generation works, by the cultural environment of the 1960s. The rest of this thesis makes frequent references to the fictional and non-fictional works of Mäkönnən Əndalkaçäw, Gərmaččäw Takla-Hawaryat, and Käbbädä Mikael. Haddis Alämayähu, Tädla Haile and Mäkönnən Dästa will also be mentioned in later chapters.

The third generation

The third generation consists of intellectuals born in the late 1920s or, more often, 1930s and who were mostly active in the late 1950s and 1960s. Their career spanned beyond 1974, but this thesis only looks at their pre-Revolution output and careers. Towering figures were Mängəstu Lämman (1928–1988), Taddässä Libän (b.1930), Abbe Gubäñña (1933/4-1980), Bərhanu Zärihun (1933/4-1987), Daññaččäw Wäṛḳu (1936-1994), Täsfaye Gässässä (b.1937), Sahlä-Səlassə Bərhanä-Maryam, Bäalu Gərma (1938-1984), and Şāgayə Gäbrä-Mädhən (1936-

2003). This group received the greatest portion of their education in Ethiopia, benefitting from the opening in Addis Abäba of secondary schools and, later, the university. Almost all of them finished their university studies before the 1960 coup, and were not involved with the student movement that gained momentum from the mid-1960s onwards⁶³. Most only went abroad for their master's degree, residing abroad for two or three years – a considerably shorter period of time compared to early generations. Only few of them received church education, and if they did, it was only for few years; the greater majority of their schooling took place in secular government institutions.

At school, as part of their curricula, they studied the works of writers belonging to older generations. Käbbädä Mikael is often cited among the leading influences, for example by Bərhanu Zārihun (Molvaer 1997a: 326), Täsfaye Gässässä (who had to learn by heart Käbbädä's poem *Əroro* and cites as an influence Käbbädä's play *YäTənbət Kəṭəro*, Molvaer 1997a: 226), Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam (who also had to learn some of Käbbädä's poems by heart, Molvaer 1997a: 368) and Daññaččāw Wārku (who learnt *Tarikənnə Məssale* by heart, Molvaer 1997a: 292). The works of Hərüy Wäldä-Səlasse and Mäkonən Əndalkačāw were also included in school curricula, as reported by Daññaččāw (Molvaer 1997a: 292). Haddis Aləmayāhu cites Käbbädä's poetry and translations as a source of inspiration, together with Hərüy's works (Molvaer 1997a: 150-151). Girmaččāw Təklä-Hawaryat's *Araya* was commonly taught as part of Amharic language classes. Less influential was Afəwərķ Gäbrä-Iyyāsus, whose collaboration with the Italians during the occupation had discredited his work; his *Ləbb Wälləd Tarik* (which in the 1950s was republished under the name *Təbbəyā*) is nevertheless cited among prescribed school readings by Sahlä-Səlasse (Molvaer 1997a: 368) and Bərhanu (who read it while attending church school in Gondär, Molvaer 1997a: 326).

By the 1960s, third-generation authors were all employed in senior positions; most of their works came out between the 1950s and the 1960s. Virtually no one had a career in politics, since high-level ambassadorial and ministerial positions were already occupied by the second-generation cohort. Nevertheless 'upon finishing their studies, they became the backbone of the civil service and constituted the core of the technical profession. [...] They had a comfortable life even if their salary was not the highest in town' (Shiferaw 2004: 33). This was particularly resented by fourth-generation students, who graduated when unemployment was on the rise. In contrast to their predecessors, third-generation intellectuals had careers more explicitly associated to media and culture, working as theatre directors, journalists, broadcasters and teachers. Mängəstu Ləmma is perhaps the intellectual who more methodically theorised the demographic and aesthetic differences between the second and third generation. Referring

⁶³ The only exception is Daññaččāw, who graduated from HSIU in 1964 and wrote protest poems while at university, but he left university before the student movement became more militant and radicalised towards the end of the decade.

somewhat dismissively to Mäkonnen Əndalkačəw, Kəbbədə Mikael and Gərmaččəw Təklə-Hawaryat, he explained in an interview:

Though some of them were educated, my predecessors were mainly of the pre-war generation. In addition to that, their class background was different from mine. Therefore, they had little chance to influence me through their ideas. Moreover, they were incapable of writing radical social criticism, because they were members of the ruling class. [...] They wrote moralistic plays in order to support the existing order. Secondly, they were not much exposed to world literature, and therefore they were not modern in outlook or technique. They were tradition-bound for the most part. They used the vernacular, but with a touch of Geez; [...] moreover, most of them did not have the classical Qene background. [...] I could not learn from the Ethiopian dramatists because their technique was backward (quoted in Akalu 1981: 82-83).

As elements of difference between his generation and his predecessors, Mängəstu highlights class background, position vis-à-vis the government, knowledge of foreign literary traditions, and technical skills. Mängəstu, interviewed during the Dərg rule, consciously or unconsciously overemphasises the degree to which the second generation was anti-revolutionary while his own generation was, contrary to the old elites, committed to social change. The third generation was, for the most part, not directly involved in the government, but still worked in public institutions and benefited from government patronage.

Third-generation authors were fluent in English, and sometimes French, read foreign newspapers and publications, and kept up to date with intellectual and cultural developments in Europe and the United States. They all exchanged and debated ideas, both in Amharic and English, in the main periodicals of the time (*Mənən*, *Ethiopia Observer*, *Addis Zämän*, *YäItiyopya Dəms*, *Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis Reporter*), and saw each other ‘around the same bars - Jimma Bar near Abune Petros Square, the Ras and the Genet hotels, and later Jolly bar and other bars at Arat Kilo’ (Shiferaw 2004: 33). Shiferaw describes this generation as spearheaded by an ‘*avant garde* group’ (2004: 28) that revolved around the ‘literary circle established on the initiative of Asfaw Damte. [...] It did not last long but it was most probably the first consciously organised literary circle in the country's history’ (2004: 20). Its members included, besides literary critic Asfaw Damte, the poet and painter Gäbrä Krəstos Dəsta (1932-1981)⁶⁴, the music instructor Ašanafi Kəbbədə (1938-1998)⁶⁵, and the aforementioned Mängəstu, Şəgaye and Təsəfaye. They read poetry and discussed novels, literary trends and art. Andreas Eshete (2013) similarly praises the ‘brilliant modernism’ that flourished in the 1960s. Under his label he lists, like Shiferaw, the work of Gäbrä Krəstos, Mängəstu and Şəgaye, and

⁶⁴ For a profile, see Shiferaw (2004).

⁶⁵ For a profile, see Kimberlin (1999).

also includes poet and essayist Solomon Däressa (b.1939), poet Yohannēs Admassu (1936-1976), novelist Səbhat Gäbrä-Əgziabher (1936-2012) and Daññaččāw Wārku.

The fourth generation

The fourth generation comprises intellectuals born after 1941 that were university students in the 1960s and 1970s; they left articles in magazines, political pamphlets and revolutionary poems but no substantial fiction or non-fiction work (Yonas 2010: 77). Because of the role it played in the 1974 revolution, this grouping is undoubtedly the most studied in historiography⁶⁶. There was little if no communication between the third and fourth generation, whose relationship was often characterised by hostility, particularly on the part of the latter towards the former. While the first three generations of intellectuals share high levels of ideological continuity, the fourth generation marks a break in the history of Ethiopia's political thought, as emphasised by the students themselves, who in their publications increasingly antagonised the older generations and claimed for themselves a new, and radically different, socio-political and ideological identity.

The third and fourth generation were both active during the 1960s and 1970s, and often frequented the same social and cultural spaces in the city. Yet, virtually all historians of the period remark that interaction between the two groups was limited. Andreas Eshete, for example, claims that there was little interplay between the 'world of beauty' of the modernist writers of the third generation and the 'world of action' of the Ethiopian Student Movement (2013: 16). Some of the literary works published by third generation intellectuals, for example Haddis Alāmayāhu's *Fəḵər Əskä Mäḵabər* ('Love unto the grave', 1965/66) fed into the political dissent of the student movement, but student publications usually condemned the old elites as colluded with Haylä Səlasse's regime. Only Gärmame Nəway, perhaps, 'represented a bridge—a rather solitary bridge, we should add—between the pre-war intellectuals and the student radicals of the 1960s and 1970s' (Bahru 1991: 212). Although the ideas of the old generations set a precedent for the students' socio-political views, the sources of inspiration of the fourth generation lay mostly outside of Ethiopia. The ideological difference between older generations and the fourth generation increased over the 1960s as the student movement became more radicalised and more explicitly supportive of Marxist-Leninist ideals. The influence of Marxism was, on the contrary, limited or non-existent for third-generation intellectuals, 'even if some of the individuals like Mengistu [i.e. Mängəstu Lämma] flirted with it in their university days' (Shiferaw 2004: 30). Fourth-generation Marxists, Teshale remarks,

⁶⁶ For example in Ottaway and Ottaway (1978), Halliday and Molyneux (1981), Addis (1975 and 1987), Balsvik (1985), Clapham (1988), Andargachew (1993), Donham (1999), Messay (2008a), Bahru (2014).

scorned the Old intelligentsia as being ‘bourgeois’, ‘feudal’, etc. The irony is that they did so without even reading their works (Teshale 2008: 358).

The divide between the first three generations and the fourth ran so deep that in the post-war period the two major ideological blocs are often referred to as ‘the old intelligentsia’ or ‘the old generations’ on the one hand, and the ‘youth’ or ‘the students’ on the other. This thesis too uses this terminology whenever first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals are compared with fourth-generation ones.

Texts

Ethiopian print culture

Early 20th century Ethiopian print culture fundamentally blurs the Western distinction, in terms of textual conventions, between journalism as factual reporting and literature as imaginative writing. The textual overlapping between newspapers and literary works was particularly evident in the decades before the Italian invasion. Newspapers contained large narrative sections, and their pages became laboratories for the birth and development of the Amharic short story (Zärihun Asfaw 1999, Fekade 1997). These short narratives were numerically more significant than the number of independent literary volumes published in the pre-war period. Newspapers were thus one of the main cultural institutions that hosted and stimulated the development of literary production in the country. The tone, stylistic devices and social function of journalism and literature were also alike. From a scholarly point of view, it is therefore possible to employ the same interpretative strategies to analyse both Ethiopian literature and Ethiopian newspapers.

Pre-war newspapers were based on a complete inversion of the Western journalistic rule that facts and opinions ought to be kept rigidly separated. The writer’s judgment often overrode the facts, which were treated as a pretext or inspiration for broader ethical and political arguments over values, customs and society. Overall, ‘views dominated over news’ (Bahru 2002: 189). The journalist’s role was not so much to inform, but rather to offer an ideological interpretation of contemporary events, and even more importantly to convey a moral teaching. Articles in *Bərhanənnā Sälām* seldom discussed current news, and when they did, it was often to make a point about the need for modernisation, the enlightened role of the Emperor, the country’s place in international relations or its ancient glories (Meseret 2013: 37). The ‘truth’ of the article concerned not so much the factuality of the events reported, but the validity of the author’s moral message. The figure of the intellectual in 20th century Ethiopia was inherently defined by civic engagement and ethical commitment. Print products were invested by the intelligentsia with being the means of this social mission. The idea of a culture aimed at

entertainment would have probably been vehemently rejected by most of the intellectuals who contributed to the nascent publishing culture.

From a stylistic point of view, creative writing, journalism, and also early historiography drew their strength from a rhetorical strategy combining poetry, hymns, proverbs, anecdotes, allegories, and biblical references. Praise poetry to Ethiopian Emperors, rulers and prominent figures, in particular, was an almost constant presence on the pages of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*. A good quality article was expected to be written in an embellished and refined Amharic, and to display lexical sophistication and high levels of erudition. The authors derived their authority by exhibiting familiarity with the corpus of oral and written heritage codified as prestigious. Reference to the traditional canon of *kəne*, religious literature, and sacred texts was a particularly powerful validation tool. This was not only passive knowledge, but also active ability to manipulate traditional textual forms and create new ones. Poems written anew often took up the whole of the first page of *Bərhanənnā Sālam* or were added at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of articles in the other pages. The persuasiveness of the journalist's argument rested on his stylistic skills and the strength of his moral message more than on the logical cogency of his arguments. More than based on logical progression, the dominant argumentative style was depended on imaginative and lyrical richness.

References to an established cultural corpus served as a mechanism of class identification – as a way for the author to exhibit his status as an insider to the restricted literate elite of Ethiopian noblemen and politicians. The reader's legitimization came, in this sense, from recognising the author as 'one of us', belonging to the reader's own social group. Similarly, the author's authoritativeness rested on parading traits associated with a shared class and educational identity. Mobilising the traditional *habāša* cultural baggage was used at the same time to reassert the traditional network of social relationships and to mark a new group identity – that of a rising elite with an international outlook and, in the elite's own definition, a pro-modernisation stance. On the pages of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*, the frequent calls for modernisation did not necessarily signify a specific ideological orientation or political commitment, but functioned mostly as a rhetorical device to signal one's membership to the new educated class. In other words, contributors all extolled the virtues of modernisation in order to bond with each other. Print products created a cultural space where a new group consciousness was articulated and the process of elite formation took shape. Reading, discussing and contributing to *Bərhanənnā Sālam* was perhaps the most significant status symbol of the rising educated elite, to the extent that Bahru remarks of the newspaper that it 'could justifiably be described as *the organ of the intelligentsia*' (2002: 188)⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ Emphasis added.

Journalism, novels and theatre were all new genres in Ethiopian cultural history, and their emergence was strongly influenced by Geez antecedents, most notably the royal chronicles, the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* and the lives of saints (Yonas 1995b). Although many first-generation intellectuals actively tried to supersede the royal chronicles, early 20th century historiography was naturally influenced by them. Similarly to newspapers and literary writing, many historiographical works, for example *Aläḳa Tayyā Gäbrä-Maryam's* 1922 *YäItyopya Həzb Tarik* ('History of the people of Ethiopia'), continued to rely on oral tales and biblical storytelling techniques and to include long sections of didactic commentary on the part of the author. In early historiography, the line between fiction and non-fiction was often blurred. Like the articles of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*, historical works were filled with hyperbolic adulation of the emperor in power and vituperative tirades against his enemies and rivals. Just like for literature and newspapers, the style of early historical studies was embellished and erudite, particularly in the case of Afäwärḳ Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, 'the great master of Amharic prose' (Bahru 2002: 158), who gave so much importance to linguistic sophistication that 'there was no historiographical crime he would shirk from committing if the turn of the phrase demanded it' (Bahru 2002: 155).

Starting from the 1950s, and more prominently from the 1960s, a progressive differentiation of genres took place. Fictional and non-fictional forms acquired a more distinct identity, and academic studies started carving out an identity distinct from the rest of Amharic cultural production. The separation of genres progressed in parallel with a gradual career specialisation for the intellectual class. While in the early 20th century the intellectual was an omniscient figure, equally at ease in theology, historiography, geography, politics, poetry, creative writing and science, from the 1950s knowledge became more clearly compartmentalised in distinct areas of expertise. Historiography became an academic field on its own. Journalism became more explicitly influenced by criteria of truthfulness and factual accuracy. The previous blending of fiction and non-fiction, the didactic orientation, the use of folkloric anecdotes and allegorical references surfaced in increasingly attenuated form. However, they never entirely disappeared. Ethiopian newspapers kept being characterised by a moralising tone and an elaborate literary style. It was a widespread editorial policy for newspaper and magazine articles to conclude with a 'lessons to be learnt' paragraph. A flowery syntax, with articles made up of two or three long sentences only, was accompanied by often obscure lexical choices, mostly neologisms constructed from ancient Geez roots or syntactical calques from European languages (Fusella 1960: 85). The synergic juxtaposition of prose and poetry, of different types of prose and different types of poetry remained systematic both in newspapers and across literary genres. Overlapping between different genres remained common. Works of historiography and newspapers alike maintained a literary veneer and often quoted poems. In novels and short stories, poems were used as an introduction or conclusion, inserted in the dialogue between characters or employed by the third-person narrator to

comment significant passages of the plot. Plays were structured on the alternation between prose and verse. Despite the progressive differentiation of genres and careers, Ethiopian print culture always tended towards the totality of the textual experience. Authors pooled together all cultural resources at their disposal in order for their moral message to be as authoritative as possible.

Amharic literature and didacticism

Didacticism was easily the most conspicuous trait of Amharic-language print culture. In the field of literary studies, it soon came under attack. Successive generations of literary critics lamented the lack of realism of early Amharic novels, and didacticism was identified as one the main limitations. Tamrat Amanuel's 1943/1944⁶⁸ *Sälä Ityopya Därasyan* ('On Ethiopian writers') sets the stage for much of the subsequent Amharic literary scholarship, especially as he targets didacticism and allegory as the main flaws of early literary output. He deems 'boring', for example, the presence of characters embodying abstract moral notions and named in a way that makes it clear what values they personify. In a 1967 conference paper, later published in 1973, Mängästu Lämman explains this didactic orientation as typical of the pre-modern stage of Amharic literature, characterised by cultural insularism and international isolation. Yohannäs Admassu complains that post-1941 works are too 'idealistic' and do not offer a critique of real life (1968/69). Kane criticises the many implausible coincidences in plots, the moralistic-didactic tone, long and erudite speeches that sound like philosophical sermons, and the one-sided treatment of characters that allegorically symbolise one virtue, concept, social class or ethnic group (1975). The works of Pierre Comba (1958), Stephen Wright (1963) and Albert Gérard (1968, 1971) are more sympathetic than Kane towards their subject matter, but share his view that pervasive didacticism and lack of psychological realism are major problems of Amharic literary production. Early Amharic works are dismissed as mere 'creative writing'. We have to wait until the 1960s, critics argue, for the first works deserving to be called 'novels' to appear on the literary scene⁶⁹.

This critical reading, common to both foreign and Ethiopian scholars and still widespread nowadays, is part of what might be called an *evolutionary-normative paradigm*. This scholarly trend reads literary history through the lens of modernisation theory⁷⁰. Basic premise is that all literatures evolve following a unilinear pattern of development, with realism

⁶⁸ *Sälä Ityopya Därasyan* was published in 1997, but according to Taye and Shiferaw (2000: 43) was written in 1943/44, and thus qualifies as one of the earliest studies on Amharic literature by an Ethiopian scholar.

⁶⁹ Haddis Alämayähu's *Fäḳər Ɔskä Mäḳabər* is often quoted as the the first full-fledged Amharic novel.

⁷⁰ The term 'modernisation theory' primarily references the social science programme developed in post-1945 USA, and predominantly fostered by sociologist Talcott Parsons. The thesis, however, uses the term in a broader sense to refer to the teleological, positivist and rationalist conception of modernity formulated in Western philosophy from the Enlightenment onwards.

as the main developmental target. Amharic literature is analysed in an evolutionistic way, from early ‘primitive’ attempts to a growing command of realism as key literary technique. This type of criticism appraises Ethiopian literature in relation to Western literary history and aesthetic values, and normatively judges its progress on the acquisition, on the part of the author, of a technical toolkit of literary procedures and formulae. Progress is conceived as the gradual import and acquisition of defined sets of technologies. Kane is probably the critic that embodies this theoretical approach in its fullest. He reads Amharic literature through Western universalism, in an evolutionary framework whereby all literatures progress in the same way towards the literary modernity that the West has already achieved. Like him, Comba (1958), Wright (1963) and Gérard (1968) tend to read Amharic literary history as a progressive rectification of early faults and mistakes, leading to the step-by-step accomplishment of a realist style (Taye and Shiferaw 2000: 35).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the teleological and technicistic assumptions of these critics lead them to neglect and belittle non-*habäša* cultures, many of which were non-literate. Groups without a long-standing tradition of written literature were considered less advanced than the *hābäša*, with their ancient inscriptions and manuscripts. The study of Ethiopian literature becomes reductively restricted to the study of Geez, Amharic and Tigrinya. Most famous exponent of this prejudicial reading is Edward Ullendorff, whose contention that Amharic and Tigrinya express the ‘real’ Ethiopia and ‘are the virtually exclusive carriers of Ethiopian civilization, literature and intellectual prestige’ (1960: 116) has now become one of the most quoted examples of the ‘Semitic-centrism’ or ‘*hābäša*-centrism’ of European scholarship on Ethiopia. In the literary field, Gérard echoes Ullendorff’s observations when he remarks that ‘no imaginative literature seems to have been produced in any of the Non-Amharic vernaculars of Ethiopia’ so that ‘the phrase Amharic literature can legitimately be used nowadays as a synonym for Ethiopian literature’ (1971: 272). Written literature in Oromo, just to mention another major Ethiopian language, was scarce because the imperial state opposed, and later banned altogether, the use of Oromo in publishing and in public places. The small size of written Oromo literature was due to external constraints, not, like Ullendorff and Gérard seem to imply, to an inherent lack of artistic creativity and aesthetic skills on the part of Oromo authors. By describing already-disadvantaged literatures as unworthy and unaccomplished, Ullendorff and Gérard offer a theoretical justification for their continued marginalisation, and create grounds to further reinforce the cultural privilege of Amharic.

Another consequence of the adoption of modernisation theory in literary studies is the tendency to read non-Western literatures only in relation to Western literatures. Western aesthetic ideals are taken to be universally valid, and therefore for a literature to become ‘modern’, it is implied it has to become more ‘Western’. Amharic literary accomplishments are measured on the degree of incorporation of those textual modes that in the West are associated

to literary modernity. For Mängəstu Lämna, for example, pre-war writers cannot be deemed modern because they ‘lacked intimate contact with world literature and could not manage to break away completely from the fetters of the earlier tradition as far as the open moralising and didacticism were concerned’ (1973: 81). It is only when Ethiopian writers came into contact with world literature (and here Mängəstu refers largely to Western literature) that Amharic literature became modern. Modernisation, then, is conceived by Mängəstu as a process of increased cultural globalisation, when exposure to Western literary models allowed writers to break away from the constraints of local literary tradition. Mängəstu makes a point that the integration of Western literature has to be selective and critical (1973: 82). Despite this cautionary approach, the import of Western models is presented as a necessary premise of modernisation, and here Mängəstu’s line of argument partly replicates Western evolutionary paradigms.

While the evolutionary-normative paradigm depreciates didacticism as ‘pre-modern’, other critical traditions attempted to interpret didacticism not in relation to supposedly universal aesthetic canons, but in the context of the cultural values and expectations of coeval Ethiopian society. Enrico Cerulli has championed this alternative interpretative paradigm, which could be called *historicist-relativist*. Objective of Ethiopian literary criticism should be, according to Cerulli, to analyse ‘what [Ethiopian literary works] represent, in terms of aesthetic value, *within their own artistic tradition*’ (Cerulli 1958: 6)⁷¹ so that they ‘can be better appreciated [...] *within the cultural environment they belong to*’ (Cerulli 1958: 8)⁷². This approach rejects any dogmatic definition of what literature ought to be and what a given genre ought to look like. The emphasis on historical and cultural relativisation leads Cerulli to have a very inclusive working definition of ‘literature’, encompassing Christian and Islamic religious literature (hymns, books of prayers, lives of saints, theological treatises), the *Kəbrä Nəgəst*, successive imperial chronicles, legal codes such as the *Fətha Nəgəst*, philosophical disquisitions such as Zära Yaḳob’s *Hatäta*, translations from Greek and Arabic, war songs composed for Ethiopian leaders, and letters written by Ethiopian emperors to other political figures. Here the notion of ‘literature’ loses any Western specificity and becomes an open and malleable concept. The rest of Cerulli’s work is characterised by the same epistemological inclusiveness. Although Cerulli’s record as a scholar was blemished by his collaboration with fascist authorities during the Italian occupation, his scholarship has the merit to offer a multicultural and multireligious understanding of Ethiopia, where there is no single ‘carrier of Ethiopian civilisation’. He gives the same scholarly dignity to written literature and oral literature, to Christian and Islamic traditions, to the history of the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’ of the Ethiopian state and, finally, to different Ethiopian languages. Besides Amharic and Geez, he pioneered the study of Oromo

⁷¹ Emphasis added.

⁷² Emphasis added.

folk literature, published studies on Somali, Kaffa and Sidama traditions, and devotes a chapter of his *La Letteratura Etiopica* to the literary evolution of 'languages other than Amharic' (Cerulli 1958: 181)⁷³. Contrary to his colleagues' insistence in measuring the lag of Amharic literature vis-à-vis the more developed Western literatures, Cerulli privileges local and regional connections, making sense of Ethiopian literary traditions in the context of their exchanges with what he calls the 'Christian Orient' and the Islamic Middle East.

Taye Assefa, Shiferaw Bekele and, more prominently, Yonas Admassu have all rejected the evolutionary-normative paradigm in favour of the historicist-relativist one. Yonas proposes a type of criticism reminiscent of Cerulli's: based on cultural and historical relativism, on an anti-dogmatic idea of literature and literary genres and on a genealogical analysis of literary forms. 'A generalized study of Amharic literature', Yonas argues in opposition to normative approaches, 'should try to describe and explain why the literature in question is what it is' (2001: 35). The task of the critic is to explain, not to judge, the author's choices and to appraise the text the way the author created it (2001: 38). Yonas advocates a context-sensitive approach to the study of Amharic literature, calling for a critical contextualisation of a text within the aesthetic parameters, sociological functions, genre and style conventions typical of its cultural environment. It is pivotal, he says, to understand the 'significance of the work in its social context' (1995: 96). This means that the critic has firstly to identify the 'scheme of values and norms', or in other words the 'major informing ideas', around which the text is structured (2001: 38), and secondly to highlight how the 'general cultural climate' influenced 'patterns of thinking and projection' in a given literary tradition (2001: 38).

It is against this backdrop that Yonas tackles the issue of didacticism. Western critics like Gérard, Yonas observes, distinguish between 'didactic prose' and 'genuine creative writing', implying that didactic genres have 'nothing to do with the literary art' (2001: 30). In opposition to this pejorative conception of didacticism, Yonas defines as 'didactic' those works that 'emphasize the intellectual and instructional potential of narrative' and 'in which intellectual considerations influence narrative structure' (Yonas 2001: 30-31). Cues as to how to better understand didacticism in Amharic literature come from Hausa literary criticism. To a foreigner's ear, Graham Furniss admits in his study of Hausa literature, the 'value-loaded' and 'moralistic' language employed by Hausa poets 'is reminiscent of the Victorian tract or the revivalist preacher' (Furniss 1996: 214). Yet, didacticism 'makes for the dynamic, expansive, adaptive nature of Hausa culture' (Furniss 1996: 214). The 'power of Hausa culture' lies precisely 'in its very directness and its ability to take any aspect of the social, political and

⁷³ In a similar vein, Lanfranco Ricci's *Letterature dell'Etiopia* ('Ethiopian literatures', 1969) covers the history of literary traditions in Geez, Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigre, Gurage, Harari and Arabic. Ricci, like Cerulli, is mindful of the need for a careful social and historical contextualisation of authors and works. For Taye and Shiferaw, 'this sociological approach to literature is [Ricci's] strong point. It is perhaps a line of inquiry that needs to be pursued further' (2000: 37).

cultural world of modern Nigeria and construct a characterisation of that feature, be it a person, event, or idea, in which certain aspects can be unequivocally condemned and other aspects clearly endorsed' (Furniss 1996: 214-215).

In the case of Amharic print culture, didacticism is perfectly coherent with the cultural expectations of the Ethiopian readers of the time. Literature and journalism were expected to convey to the reader a strongly edifying message, and audiences read novels and newspapers with the precise objective of receiving a moral teaching. Texts were skilfully built to fulfil this function. Some of the characteristics of Amharic literature deplored by evolutionary-normative critics are actually some of the texts' main assets, as they effectively guide the reader through the interpretation process. Having an all-round positive protagonist called Awwākā, 'the one who knows' and who indeed is always proven right in the plot, may not be 'realist' in the Western sense, but this is because the author, in this case Həruy Wäldä-Selasse, is not attempting to write a 'realist' text in the Western sense. Həruy wants to convey a political message and propose some reforms, and by calling his character Awwākā he is making sure that the reader immediately recognises which character has the soundest political vision. The fact that plots and characters are simplified is instrumental in making the author's message clear. Characters symbolically named after certain virtues or qualities facilitate the reader's interpretative process, and are therefore perfectly functional to the role Amharic literature performed in Ethiopian culture. Portraying individualised characters and their personal vicissitudes is not what Həruy is interested in. Through his characters, he wants to discuss moral values, political ideas, and philosophical questions. This holds particularly true for early Amharic literature, but to a certain extent even nowadays it is not the individual character, but what the character stands for that the reader wants to be 'true' and 'real'. Just like in Hausa poetry, the didacticism of Amharic literature opens up a social space to collectively discuss, in a very direct way, what is good, just and virtuous and what is bad, unjust and deplorable, both in the private and the public sphere. Each author puts forward a specific moral vision for his society, where individual ethics is linked very directly to the public and political one. It is the moralistic vigour of the writer that in the eyes of the reader qualifies a text as 'good'.

First, second and third-generation texts

These considerations on the role of didacticism acquire a particular relevance when it comes to the relationship between literary texts and political thought. Reading novels, theatre and poetry as sources for the history of Ethiopian political thought reflects the desire of the authors themselves that their texts be read as political manifestos or political treaties. Plot and characters were used to vehicle the author's political message and were subordinated to the political objectives of the text. The political function of the text overrode the aesthetic one for the whole period under consideration in this thesis, but, although it never became dominant, the

aesthetic component of the text grew in importance over time. The characters became more complex, the plots more intricate, and the political truth the author wants to communicate became more nuanced and refracted.

This evolution is evident when comparing first-, second- and third-generation novels⁷⁴. Perfect representative of the first generation is Hərüy Wäldä-Selasse's *Addis Alām* ('New World', 1931/32). The main character, as cited above, is Awwākā, 'the knowledgeable one'. Keen to learn more about Europe and Western civilisation, a young Awwākā goes to France to study. Eight years later, he returns to his native village of Tägulät, and he soon realises that his new ideas and lifestyle are in strong contrast with those of his family and townsfolk. His father's illness and death provokes a first major series of conflicts. Awwākā wants to call a European doctor, while the family prefers to resort to the services of a *däbtära*. Hərüy is clear in condemning the family's 'superstitious' beliefs. Awwākā is blamed for using the phone, which the family considers a tool of the devil, and accused of insensitivity for grieving his father's death in a restrained, discreet manner. His father's confessor is severely disappointed by Awwākā's decision not to organise the customary funerary banquet. Awwākā says that the banquet is costly and ostentatious, and that the attendees merely consider it an occasion for drunkenness and brawls; instead, he prefers to make a donation to the local church for charitable purposes. Second occasion of conflict between Awwākā and his family is Awwākā's marriage. The young man refuses to marry the woman his family selects for him. The family is shocked when Awwākā declares he will marry a woman of his own choosing, and that he considers marriage to be indissoluble. His friends, with their many wives and extraconjugal affairs, are scandalised. Awwākā's marriage celebrations consist of a simple church ceremony, and the townspeople are offended that he refuses to offer the customary wedding feast. Just like for his father's funeral, Awwākā opposes the feast on the grounds that it only invites drunkenness and lewd singing. Instead, he uses another 'instrument of the devil', the phonograph, to broadcast religious hymns praising the sanctity of marriage. The novel concludes with Awwākā convincing the leaders of the Church to promulgate ten of his proposals – from limiting drunkenness and extravagant expenses to a better religious education and stricter code of conduct for priests. As it is evident from this summary, the plot consists of many short sketches that give Hərüy a chance to instruct the reader about medicine and technology and argue against certain customs. The identification of Hərüy with his protagonist is total, and Awwākā is Hərüy's mouthpiece in everything he does and says. The truth is, in its entirety, in Awwākā/Hərüy's hands: Awwākā is always right and his ideas are clearly presented as the best. In the end, the hero triumphs. Family and priests recognise that Awwākā's position is correct, and change their behaviour accordingly.

⁷⁴ The comparison is further developed in chapters 3 and 4.

Gərmaččāw Tāklä-Hawaryat's *Araya* (1948/49), the most famous second-generation novel, presents a slightly more complicated picture. The protagonist's name, once again, makes it clear who is the hero: Araya means 'good example'. Just like Awwākä, Araya is a native of Tägulät and, again like Awwākä, studies abroad in France. After fifteen years abroad, he comes back to Ethiopia and takes up a job in the Ministry of Agriculture. He soon grows disappointed by the intrigues and inefficiencies in the government, and withdraws from government service. He moves to the countryside and lives as a farmer until the Italian invasion. The war pushes him into action, and he becomes a resistance fighter. After the liberation, he is again offered government jobs, and although he refuses them at first, he seems to change his mind out of sense of duty at the end of the novel.

Like in *Addis Alām*, the plot follows the life of the protagonist. The focus of the narrator remains always on Araya; the other characters are those that Araya meets and interacts with. There is no proper 'story'. The novel treats some major historical events in Ethiopia's history, such as the Italian occupation, but overall it mostly consists of various episodes of Araya's life, including a number of dialogues he has with an array of other characters. These digressions allow Gərmaččāw to discuss various political ideas, and although Araya's point of view generally comes across as the most convincing, the other characters often put forward some compelling arguments. Many of their comments are thoughtful, sometimes even more thoughtful than Araya's own. Some dialogues are so balanced that in the end no one really wins the argument. Araya interacts with many characters on an equal level, in contrast with the huge knowledge gap between the cultured Awwākä and his uneducated rural family. While Awwākä's antagonists are ignorant and their ideas ludicrous, in *Araya* Gərmaččāw is instead quite sympathetic towards the point of view of other characters. Araya clearly remains the writer's favourite, but many debates seem to fictionalise Gərmaččāw's own doubts and concerns, although in the end the writer agrees with Araya's proposed solutions. In *Araya*, the truth is therefore more diffuse, not completely monopolised by the protagonist. Compared to *Addis Alām*, the identification of the writer with his protagonist is not total. The character of Araya is modelled on Gərmaččāw's father, and therefore more than a spokesperson for Gərmaččāw, or for Gərmaččāw's own generation, Araya rather represents the virtues of the first generation. Gərmaččāw's relationship with his protagonist is aspirational and nostalgic, and therefore characterised by a certain distance and detachment. Araya remains a hero, but he is not perfect. His choice to retire to the countryside is certainly not brave, and has been interpreted by some critics as a form of escapism (Molvaer 2008: 190-191).

Daññaččāw Wäṛku's *Adäfräs* (1969/70) exemplifies how third-generation novels continue this trend. The novel's plot is, once again, rather simple, and mostly consists of conversations between the main characters. The story opens in a village in the countryside where a local landlady, Wäyzäro Asäggaš, is preparing to receive a group of visitors coming

from Addis Abäba. *Wäyzäro* Asäggaš is constructed as the prototype of Ethiopia's old aristocratic class, and she is seen rapaciously exploiting the work of one of her tenants, Wardofa. She has a daughter, Šiwäne. The visitors from Addis include Asäggaš's brother, *Ato Wäldu*, a wealthy merchant who, like Araya, was educated in France before the Italian occupation. After the liberation, he worked for a while in government service but, disillusioned with the malfunctioning of the bureaucracy, eventually decided, again like Araya, to retire to the countryside. Another visitor is *Ato Teso*, a judge that is coming to the village to settle some court cases among farmers. *Ato Teso* brings with him his nephew Adäfräs, a university student who was assigned to the nearby town of Däbrä Sina for his year of National Service. Adäfräs is attracted to Šiwäne, but also flirts with Roman, Wardofa's daughter. He cannot decide between the two women, and ultimately does not commit to either. He suddenly dies when he gets hit on the head by a stone while trying to mediate between a group of striking high school students and the army unit sent to restore order. In the novel's tragic conclusion, Šiwäne ends up a nun and Roman a prostitute.

Although the novel's title clearly indicates that the protagonist is Adäfräs, the novel follows a much higher number of characters, who are introduced independently, and not, like in *Araya*, via the stratagem of having the protagonist casually meet them one after the other. Adäfräs is not present in all scenes and the narration gives ample space to other personalities. The dialogues are, compared to *Araya*, even more balanced. It is evident that Daññaččäw does not sympathise with characters like *Wayzäro* Asäggaš or her father confessor, *Abba* Addise, but he makes sure the position of both is represented as legitimate and articulate. As to which character represents more closely Daññaččäw's views, the situation is rather fluid. Adäfräs certainly voices many of Daññaččäw's positions, but *Ato Wäldu* and *Ato Teso*, too, put forward some cogent arguments. Overall, then, there is no single character that acts as Daññaččäw's mouthpiece. The writer himself is less sure of what is the right solution to Ethiopia's problems, and presents the reader with a series of open questions, without offering the 'right' interpretation. Even more significantly, there are no heroes in the novel. Adäfräs dies unexpectedly in a completely unremarkable way. One of the most positive characters is not, as it could have been expected from the title, Adäfräs, but *Ato Wäldu*. Wäldu has a sound perspective on many issues, but in many cases he just advocates a fatalistic acceptance of the country's state of affairs. There is nothing heroic about his biography either. He retired from government service because unwilling to work within the imperial bureaucracy, leads a simple life with his illiterate and 'pagan' wife, and does not interfere with politics or anything outside his business. Also, he does not care much about the farm that he and his sister *Wayzäro* Asäggaš have inherited together. Just like the character of Araya was modelled on Gərmaččäw's father, Wäldu is modelled on Daññaččäw's father, and in both cases between the writer and his protagonist there is a generational and ideological separation. Contrary to Awwäkä's impeccable moral

righteousness, all characters in *Adäfräs* have positive and negative traits. No one in the novel detains the truth because Daññaččäw does not have a single truth to pass on to his readers. The novel stages, embodied in different characters, the different and sometimes antithetical ideas coexisting side by side in Daññaččäw's thought. Each character represents part of Daññaččäw's ideology, and if the characters disagree with each other it is because Daññaččäw cannot reconcile some of the ambiguities of the political thought of his own generation. *Adäfräs*, *Ato Wäldu* and *Ato Teso*, therefore, all voice Daññaččäw's diverse, and sometimes inherently contradictory, opinions.

Literary theory and the study of political thought

Amharic literary theory is closely interlinked to prominent themes of Ethiopian political thought. Firstly, Ethiopian and foreign literary critics had to deal with the basic methodological question of what is 'literature' in the Ethiopian context. Restrictive and Eurocentric definitions have so far coexisted with more context-sensitive and relativist inquiries. The study of political thought presents the same terminological problems. Concepts rooted in Western political philosophy, such as 'liberalism' and 'conservatism' have been employed to talk about the Ethiopian intellectual scene in an uncritical top-down fashion, without the necessary attention to local cultural, historical and political nuances. Secondly, teleological conceptions of literary modernity find resonance with the teleological way in which Ethiopian scholars conceived socio-political and economic development. Thirdly, the way literary critics have focused on the acquisition of techniques and practical skills to assess whether a text qualifies as 'modern' is part of a broader Ethiopian tendency to define modernity in technicistic terms. Fourthly, both literary critics and political thinkers had to confront the issue of Ethiopia's regional belonging. Amharic literature was appraised, in the works of some critics, in relation to Western cultural production, or, in the works of other critics, in relation to the 'Christian Orient' and Islamic Middle East; recently, the Ethiopian literary output has been studied in the context of Sub-Saharan African literature. In political thought, too, scholars have emphasised different networks of regional connections, and comparisons with the West, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa have been object of long-lasting discussions.

A fifth dimension of Amharic literary studies with a close bearing on Ethiopian political thought is the alternation between imitative and adaptive critical paradigms. Some literary critics read Amharic literature exclusively through the lens of Western aesthetic ideas, including ideas influenced by modernisation theory. This resulted in the marginalisation of non-Amharic/Tigrinya literary traditions, dismissed as pre-modern. Other critics analysed Amharic output via local aesthetic ideals, only occasionally complementing their approach with selective borrowings from the Western critical corpus. Historians of Ethiopian political thought, too, have debated whether Ethiopian intellectuals mostly relied on imitative or adaptive paradigms.

Christopher Clapham, for example, thinks that Ethiopian political thought is characterised by what he calls ‘politics of emulation’ (2006), based on a passive imitation of a succession of foreign models. Other scholars stress that, to the contrary, Ethiopian political thought is defined by processes of creative appropriation based on the attempt to ‘Ethiopianise’ selected foreign elements and integrate them within the Ethiopian cultural milieu. The thesis agrees with this second interpretation, and argues that, far from merely drawing from outside models, the political thought of the first three generations of intellectuals remained largely within the cultural milieu of Ethiopia’s traditional philosophy of history. Before moving to discuss the political ideology of first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals, therefore, the next chapter describes the pivotal role such traditional philosophy of history played in the imperial intellectual scene.

Chapter 2 – Philosophies of history: the Grand Narrative and its opponents

The dominance of one interpretative framework

This chapter analyses Ethiopian historiographical discourse and philosophy of history. It is only against this backdrop, it will be argued in later chapters, that it is possible to analyse the history of Ethiopian political thought. Political ideologies were closely connected, and in some sense they were even a by-product, of the philosophy of history described in this chapter. The interpretation of the Ethiopian past has been largely dominated, from the 19th century to the present day, by a specific historiographical framework, variably called ‘Great tradition’ or ‘Grand tradition’ (Clapham 2002: 38), ‘Ethiopianist tradition’ (Crummey 2001: 8), ‘Ethiopianist nationalism’ (Semir 2009a: 380), ‘Church and State tradition’ (Triulzi 2002: 277), ‘Greater Ethiopia’ approach (Triulzi 2002: 282) and ‘Pan-Ethiopian ideology’ (Triulzi 2002: 279)⁷⁵. This chapter maps out the origin and development of this hegemonic historiographical discourse, here referred to as ‘Grand Narrative’ in reference to Jean-François Lyotard’s use of the term (1979). Lyotard employs the concept of ‘grand narrative’, ‘metanarrative’ or ‘master story’ to design a ‘global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience’ (Stephens and McCallum 1998: 6). The Grand Narrative is therefore a type of discourse with the universalist ambition to find general truths about men, nature and history. Not only does it organise knowledge, but, perhaps more crucially, legitimises knowledge, establishing the discursive rules by which a statement can be judged true or false. It operates as an ‘arbiter from which all the little narratives would derive their legitimation’ (Hyman 2001: 15), and marginalises knowledge produced in unauthorised locations with unauthorised methodologies. It can therefore be considered an ‘ultimate organising logic that positions all the little narratives and explains how they are related to each other’ (Hyman 2001: 15).

This chapter analyses the Grand Narrative’s theoretical underpinnings: an essentialist vision of identity, a transcendental conception of history, a unicentric and teleological orientation and a strong emphasis on concepts of continuity, indigeneity and unity. From its foundational text, the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* (‘Glory of Kings’, discussed below), the Grand Narrative inherited a Zionist ideology of chosenness, often translated in various ‘centrisms’ and ‘exceptionalisms’ and in a hierarchical distinction between cultural centres and peripheries. Ethiopia, so this narrative goes, was born out of divine will in a biblical past, and has always existed as a nation ever since. This nationalistic interpretation stresses the cultural and territorial unity of the country, its continuity and ‘uninterrupted’ history. One of the main characteristics

of the Grand Narrative is the ahistorical use of the word ‘Ethiopia’ to describe both the Abyssinian Empire and the modern Ethiopian nation-state. Scholars will be quoted using the term ‘Ethiopia’ even when speaking of the Solomonic polity and *habäša* cultural heritage only. Moreover, ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Abyssinia’ are generally used in the Grand Narrative in a de-historicised way, without accounting for the fact that in the region’s past ‘the expressions were not always used to denote a recognisable political-territorial state, but this is how they have usually been interpreted by subsequent writers and scholars, wishing to support the concept of a continuous and ancient regional imperium with all the romantic connotations such a concept implies’ (Reid 2007: 242). I preferred not to intervene to correct these ambiguities, both because it would be redundant to point this out every time and also to demonstrate how pervasive this transhistorical conception of Ethiopianness is in the Grand Narrative.

Starting from the late 1960s, but more prominently in the past 30 years, scholars and political actors have complained that, by retaining a monopoly over the way Ethiopia’s past is interpreted, the Grand Narrative has prevented a full-rounded understanding of Ethiopian history. New counter-hegemonic paradigms gained visibility first in the public arena, and subsequently in academic scholarship, where a voluminous body of scholarly work has been produced to contest the Grand Narrative’s legitimacy⁷⁵. The late 1960s are generally presented as a turning point in the history of Ethiopian historiography, when the counter-historiographies supplanted the Grand Narrative. This thesis agrees with this reading, but rather than a paradigm shift, it proposes a two-tier model whereby the Grand Narrative, with its promise of a ‘separate destiny’ of glory for Ethiopia, has *always* been accompanied by a counter-historiography of disillusionment, which emerges to the surface of historical discourse at key moments in time.

In fact, ‘none of the alternative mythico-histories about [...] Ethiopia is still outdated’ (Semir 2009b: 311). The Grand Narrative is still very much prominent in present-day Ethiopia, surfacing in academic scholarship, in popular history books by non-professional historians, and in the way history is taught both in high schools, colleges and sometimes universities. Abroad, too, the ‘romance of Ethiopia’ (Dagmawi, Tillet & Elizabeth 2010) remains strong among all those diasporic Africans and black nationalists (some of them Ethiopians themselves) who uphold the Grand Narrative against Western racist stereotypes on Africa. The post-1991

⁷⁵ This thesis also refers to it as ‘imperial narrative’ or ‘imperial nationalism’. On top of the scholars quoted here, Jordan Gebre-Medhin extensively discusses the Great Tradition in his *Peasants and nationalism in Eritrea: a critique of Ethiopian Studies* (1989: 1-36). See also Markakis (2011: 19-20).

⁷⁶ As for the *Kəbrä Nəgəst*, Bahru is clear that ‘no self-respecting historian could take seriously’ its content (Bahru 2000: 4), and indeed successive Ethiopian intellectuals, starting from Gäbrä-Həywät Baykädañ (*Məniləkna Ityopya*, ‘Mənilək and Ethiopia’, 1912) and Täamrat Emanuel (*Sälä Ityopya Därasyan*, ‘On Ethiopian writers’, 1943/44) at the beginning of the 20th century, have refused to give it any historiographical credit. But the appeal of the *Kəbrä Nəgəst* has not diminished, at least among non-academic historians; Belai Giday’s 1992 work *Ethiopian civilization*, for example, gives the legend a foundational position in Ethiopian history. At a popular level, the story narrated in the *Kəbrä Nəgəst* remains immensely cherished and the story retains a special place in the northern Ethiopian imaginary.

restructuring of the state along ethno-federalist lines, perceived as it was as the victory of ethnic-based counter-historiographies over the Grand Narrative, has, if anything, generated a further polarisation of history writing. Debates over identity have had a particular urgency for diasporic groups, and transnational networks of activists and intellectuals have bolstered, at different ends of the political and ethnic spectrum, both the Grand Narrative and the counter-historiographies accompanying it (Semir 2009b: 315).

The Grand Narrative

A state ideological project

The central focus of the Grand Narrative is the Ethiopian state, and the ‘ups and downs of what is assumed to be a broadly continuous political organisation, over the space of some two thousand years’ (Clapham 2002: 38)⁷⁷. There is no single way this ‘familiar tale of Ethiopian history’ (Clapham 2002) has been narrated. Some versions stress certain elements, others emphasise different factors. Despite these minor variants, the Grand Narrative is a highly systemised type of historiographical discourse based on a set of stable coordinates, and as such, it always maintains a distinctive identity and a basic ‘plot’. Opening the plot is usually the Aksumite Empire, in its golden age (1st-4th century AD) one of the great world powers alongside Rome, Persia and China and one of the first nations to convert to Christianity (4th century). The decline of Aksum (7th-9th centuries) saw the rise of the Zagwe dynasty (c900-1270), who built the famous rock-hewn churches at Lalibäla, until Yəkunno Amlak took the throne in 1270, initiating an era of glory for the Abyssinian kingdom. The peace and prosperity that followed Yəkunno Amlak’s so-called Solomonic ‘restoration’ were later interrupted by periods of external intrusion (the *jihad* of Ahmād Grañ, the Portuguese influence, the Oromo migration), which, despite the glories of the Gondarine period (1635-1769), ultimately resulted in the political fragmentation and internal conflicts of the *Zämänä Mäsaḥānt* (‘Age of the Princes’, 1769-1855). The tables turned in the middle of the 19th century, with the rise of Tewodros II, who initiated the process of modernisation and centralisation of the country. Yohannēs IV followed suit, and Mənilək II finally completed the state-building project: under his reign Ethiopia reconquered all of its lost lands, establishing its present-day borders, and, unique in Africa, defeated European imperialism at Adwa. After the brief interlude of Iyasu, the modernisation of the country initiated by the trio of 19th century emperors was later continued by Ras Täfäri/Haylā Səlasse, only fleetingly interrupted by the Italian occupation. The 1974 revolution, the wars against Eritrean liberation movements and Siad Barre’s Somalia, the

⁷⁷ Crummey agrees that the Grand Narrative is characterised by a ‘state/nation building agenda’ (2003: 120, see also Crummey 2001: 10). Triulzi talks about the ‘Great Tradition of a centralising, independent and unitary State rooted in an ancient past and led by an innovative monarchy’ (2002: 278).

ultimate defeat of Mängästu Haylä-Maryam in 1991 and the rise to power of the EPRDF era complete the story.

As this brief summary shows, the Grand Narrative tells an eminently top-down political history; it is a history of the elites, focused on the centre of the Ethiopian polity. Abyssinian rulers have systematically used history to command legitimacy and to project state-bound ideas of nationhood. This is most certainly not unique to the Ethiopian context. The state always reconstructs the memory of the state's past as 'foundational knowledge' (Toggia 2008: 319). As such, state history always 'claims totality' (Toggia 2008: 320). In the case of Ethiopia, history writing has been so inextricably subordinated to political and religious institutions that Ethiopian historiography can be considered 'a state ideological project' *tout court* (Toggia 2008: 320). The rulers' political power and narrative power go hand in hand, and the totalising aim of historical discourse is more effectively reached when political power is successfully centralised and territorial control secured. The political centralisation characterising 19th century Ethiopia was supported by, and in turn supported, a consolidation of the Grand Narrative, the state's self-constructed history of its 'Solomonic' origins.

Founding myth that structures much of the Grand Narrative is that narrated in the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* ('The Glory of Kings'). Building on the often-quoted biblical verse 'Ethiopia shall stretch her hands to God' (Psalms 68:31), the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* relates how the Ethiopians replaced the Israelites as God's chosen people. Ethiopia's covenant with God was established through the actions of Mənilək I, the son of King Solomon and Makədda, Queen of Sheba⁷⁸. After growing up in his mother's kingdom, Mənilək decided to visit his father in Jerusalem, and on his way back to Ethiopia he carried the Ark of the Covenant with him. Upon Mənilək's arrival, the Ethiopians duly abandoned their traditional beliefs and converted to the new religion. The Queen of Sheba abdicated in favour of her son, and with Mənilək's enthronement a new dynastic line was founded in Ethiopia of kings descending from Solomon. 'No one except the male seed of David, the son of Solomon the King', asserts Makədda in chapter 87, 'shall ever reign over Ethiopia' (Budge 1922: 147). The transferral of the Ark from Jerusalem to Aksum (where, according to the Orthodox Church, it is still located, in the church of St. Mary of Zion) meant to signify, in the intention of the writers, that Mənilək I was the true heir of God's revelation and that God, disappointed with the Israelites, had shifted his favour to the Ethiopians.

⁷⁸ In the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* the Queen of Sheba is identified as 'Queen of Ethiopia', *nəgəstā Ityopya*. The capital of her reign was Däbrä Makədda ('mountain/fortress of Makədda'), generally identified with Aksum (Askum, though, is never mentioned in the book).

For centuries the legend of the Queen of Sheba circulated in different versions and in various cultural traditions both orally and in writing⁷⁹. Drawing from these antecedents⁸⁰, the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* was comprehensively put together in its definitive form the 14th century, probably to legitimise the coming to power in Ethiopia of a new family line⁸¹. The new rulers who ousted the Zagwe dynasty in 1270 justified their newly acquired power by claiming ‘lawful’ Solomonic descent⁸². The overthrowing of the Zagwe reign was framed, in the new official discourse, as the ‘restoration’ of Ethiopia’s legitimate Semitic rulers, descendants of Mənilək I and thus of Solomon, over the Cushitic Agaw usurpers⁸³. The *Kəbrä Nəgäst* rule of Solomonic succession became a cornerstone of Ethiopia’s monarchical ideology. From the 14th century onwards, Abyssinian emperors claimed legitimacy by demonstrating (or, in some cases, fabricating) Solomonic ancestry. Haylä Səlassie famously inscribed the principle in the 1955 Ethiopian constitution, whose second article recognised a direct (and uninterrupted) line of descent from Solomon to Haylä Səlassie himself: ‘the Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem’ (quoted in Toggia 2008: 325). Aksum, the ancient capital and location of the Ark of the Covenant, did not lose its symbolic prestige. The heritage of Aksum became a sought-after cultural prize for successive Ethiopian rulers in search of legitimisation. Emperors were crowned in Aksum and figurative elements of Aksumite architecture were replicated time and again in the vast majority of religious and political buildings erected in the post-Aksumite centuries.

Beyond its impact on Ethiopia’s monarchical ideology, the narrative of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* also symbolically repositioned Ethiopia at the holy centre of God’s creation. Aksum, the

⁷⁹ The legend is present in the Bible and it was widespread in ancient Jewish, Coptic and Islamic traditions.

⁸⁰ For a list of the literary sources and traditions the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* draws from, see Hubbard (1957).

⁸¹ Alongside the traditional interpretation of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* as an instrument for the legitimisation of the Solomonic dynasty against the Zagwe, other interpretations have been proposed. Scholars have suggested, for example, that the clergy responsible for the composition of the work had an evident northern (pro-Təgray) bias, against a kingdom more and more based in the Amharic-speaking south (Ricci 1969: 815). For Marrassini, the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* ‘may well have been composed for [...] one or some of the ruling classes of Təgray, against the claims of the south. [...] This agrees with the clearly ‘northern’ traditions the [*Kəbrä Nəgäst*] elaborates; only subsequently it would have been adopted by the Solomonic dynasty’ (Marrassini 2007: 366).

⁸² The ideas of Israelite descent and that Ethiopia possess the Ark of the Covenant both predate the composition of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst*. Claims of Israelite descent were a frequent phenomenon in the monarchies of the Middle East and Northeast Africa in ancient and medieval times. Marrassini remarks that ‘this in turn is obviously related to the widespread tendency of early Christian communities to identify themselves with the *Verus Israel*’ (2007: 366). In Ethiopia, Israelite descent was also claimed by the Zagwe. Therefore ‘the tradition of Israelite descent was not necessarily connected to the founding legend of the [Solomonic dynasty]’ (Kaplan 2007: 688).

⁸³ In the manuscript of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* translated by Bulge, the colophon describes the Zagwe as non-Israelites and ‘transgressors of the Law’ (Budge 1922: xviii).

sacred city of the covenant with God, became the centre of a new symbolic geography. The map portrayed in Figure 1 is a 19th century reproduction of an original contained in a manuscript of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst*⁸⁴. Its upper part represents Aksum (in the square) surrounded by two concentric circles, the inner one with the names of cardinal points, the outer one with names of Təgray provinces (Bassett 1998: 28). Its lower part represents a wind rose with cardinal points around. Space here reminds of Islamic cosmological maps, with twelve astral sectors (corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac) rotating around a centre of gravity (Bassett 1998: 28). At the time the map was first drawn, the Aksumite empire had long disappeared – but without losing its religious significance as a second Jerusalem. Aksum here is the centre of the Ethiopian political and religious universe, the holy core of Ethiopian Christianity and of a divinely-ordained empire, projecting its power farther away towards its provinces. Besides following ‘a honoured ethnocentric tradition’ (Bassett 1998: 29), then, the concentric circular form of the map ‘lends itself to distinguishing center from periphery, believers from nonbelievers, and the known from the unknown in a hierarchical and orderly framework’ (Bassett 1998: 29). The fact that the map was reproduced exactly in the same way in 1859, centuries after it was first drawn, shows the remarkable persistence of a philosophy conflating history, terrestrial and celestial geography, religion and politics.

The ideology of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* momentarily lost its centrality during the *Zāmānā Mäsafənt*⁸⁵, but was revived again, in a slightly modified form, in the 19th century. Particularly pressing in the fragmented political situation of the period was the need to find authoritative mechanisms to legitimise imperial rule (Crummey 1988: 15). Aspirant national leaders launched propaganda campaigns to win the favour of various sectors of society (Crummey 1988: 37). Tewodros II, Täklä Giyorgis II, Yohannəs IV and Mənilək II ‘avidly sought legitimation by reference to early historical periods’ (Crummey 1988: 37), and drew heavily from inherited symbols of religiosity and statehood. At the same time, though, they refashioned this heritage to suit the specific historical circumstances in which they found themselves. They ‘posed as righteous’, proclaimed ‘renewal from degradation’ and distanced themselves ‘from the degraded kingdom of the earlier parts of the century and its [...] shadow kings’ (Crummey 1988: 37). This redefinition of political and historical symbols marked the shift, in the second half of the 19th century, from the Solomonic to a ‘neo-Solomonic’ political culture.

The neo-Solomonic ideology brought about, in Crummey’s analysis, three innovations: a shift in dynastic legitimacy from the male-only line of descent to bilateral practices; the

⁸⁴ This type of map, with round shaped diagrams of the Təgray region with Aksum at its centre, has been well studied, see Conti Rossini (1943), Neugebauer (1981), Alula Pankhurst (1989), Heldman (2011), Dege-Müller (2012).

⁸⁵ Yet, the fact that even during the *Zāmānā Mäsafənt* the legitimate, but in that period virtually powerless, Solomonic rulers were not replaced by non-Solomonic ones demonstrate the tenacity and resilience of the Solomonic ideology.

abandonment of the principle of royal seclusion; and a rejection of structured polygyny in favour of monogamous marriage customs sanctified by the Holy Eucharist. Despite these innovations, the neo-Solomonic ideology retained a ‘backward looking’ (1988: 38) character, and continued to draw its strength from past narratives and symbols. Nineteenth-century emperors resumed the use of the imperial title of Aksumite origin *negusä nägäst* (king of kings) and presented themselves as the sons of David and Solomon; they claimed divine election and spent much effort supporting the Ethiopian bishop to win the favour of the Orthodox Church; they stressed their own religious piety and established a new public morality at court. Regnal names were an important area where continuity with the past and moral renewal were emphasised side by side. Tewodros was a regnal name chosen in reference to a popular religious tradition in which a leader called Tewodros would restore peace and justice in a world of moral decadence and societal breakdown. Secular references were also made to preceding examples of kingship: Täklä Giyorgis chose its regnal name after an 18th century king of the Gondär area nicknamed Fəṣṣame Mängəst (‘Ender/fulfiller of the Kingdom’); by choosing the name of this earlier king, Täklä Giyorgis thus announced the rebirth of the kingdom. The name Yohannəs IV was a secular choice with religious overtones, as it referenced back to the 17th century Gondarine king Yohannəs I nicknamed the ‘just’, ‘righteous’, ‘holy’. With Mənilək II, the Grand Narrative came full circle where it had started. Mənilək proved skilful in associating with the monarchy an array of symbolic paraphernalia, such as the Lion of Judah (Sven Rubenson 1965). Overall, 19th century emperors built the ‘closest possible association of religion, sexual morality and political rule’ (Crummey 1988: 19) and thus greatly ‘reinforced the religious foundation of monarchical ideology’ (Crummey 1988: 19).

At the same time that 19th century Ethiopian rulers were reviving for legitimization purposes Ethiopia’s traditional pool of historical symbols and myths, the Grand Narrative also came to acquire in this period distinctively new traits. The first of these is linked to the transformation of the Solomonic empire into a sovereign state in the modern sense, with a fixed territory marked by internationally-recognised boundaries. This meant that, in the new international system, Solomonic emperors came to rule by international law a precisely-defined and contractually-demarcated territory. The idea of Ethiopia became anchored for the first time to a fixed geographic space and acquired a clearly defined cartographical identity. Secondly, the newly delineated borders were located, as a result of Mənilək II’s military campaigns, much farther afield than the traditional territorial core of the Solomonic polity. The Abyssinian Empire had already been multicultural, multireligious and multilingual, but the range and scale of ethnic diversity encompassed by the new state was unprecedented, and required Ethiopian leaders to rethink ideas of nationhood and develop additional policies for the new provinces. Thirdly, the 1896 victory at Adwa revived the old notion of Ethiopia as a transhistorical and divinely-ordained nation endowed with a mythical ‘spirit of survival’. In the post-Adwa

international context, it was the political aspects of this survival that were more prominently incorporated in the Grand Narrative. The heroic parable of Ethiopia's defeat of European colonialism was constructed vis-à-vis colonised Africa, and ideas of Ethiopia's exceptionalism or uniqueness were greatly emphasised as a result. Finally, another traditional element that was revived at the end of the 19th century was a teleological conception of history inspired by the Christian doctrine. At the level of state narrative, the Christian teleology was secularised into modernisation theory, and progress became the self-proffered mission of the state. By the turn of the century, then, the Grand Narrative incorporated a new territorial kind of identity, a new configuration of the relationships between national core and national periphery, a new epic of national independence and a new teleology of state-driven modernisation. With the addition of these four elements, the Grand Narrative reached its present form. No significant changes in its basic plot followed in successive decades⁸⁶. Most works of history published up to the 1950s were substantially informed by this framework, which later became institutionalised with the preparation of history textbooks for Ethiopian schools in the post-1941 period and the founding of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (1962) and the Department of History (1963-4) at Haylä Səlasse I University.

Uninterrupted history, uninterrupted identities

Easily the most noticeable feature of the Grand Narrative is its emphasis on notion of continuity. Ethiopia has existed for thousands of years – two thousands, in some accounts, three thousands, in others, and over seven thousand⁸⁷ in Ermias's *Ethiopia, The Classic Case* (1997). This millennial history is, in an expression repeated so many times as to become almost a slogan, 'uninterrupted'⁸⁸. Ethiopia, so the Grand Narrative goes, was born out of divine will in a biblical past, and has always existed as a nation ever since. Starting from the 1920s (Toggia 2008: 328) the lists of kings of Ethiopian medieval manuscripts were systematised into macro-chronologies stretching as far back as Aksum, with the dates of reigning periods almost always neatly matching. Aksum, and then Lalibāla, Gondär and Addis Abāba are presented in the Grand Narrative as the successive capitals of a nation with a stable and static historical, cultural and territorial identity. The new millennium in 2007/2008⁸⁹ was celebrated by the *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* with a special issue whose articles reiterated, in one way or another, the idea of a continuous history. Ayele, for instance, remarks that the Ethiopians 'are time-endowed people with a claim to uninterrupted long human development' (2008: 24) and

⁸⁶ Except for a partial incorporation of some aspects of Pan-Africanism starting from the 1960s (chapter 6).

⁸⁷ In the book cover, Ermias refers to Ethiopia as 'a biblical nation under God that survived great trials for 7490 years of its existence' (1997).

⁸⁸ Which has made some historians wonder which people's history is *not* 'uninterrupted'. The expression 'uninterrupted history' is for Reid 'a tautological coupling if ever there was one' (2001: 242).

⁸⁹ The date is due to the difference between the Ethiopian calendar and the Gregorian calendar.

that in their ‘long history, [...] faith is a constant factor that informs their continuity and sense of identity’ (2008: 26). Among foreign scholars, Harold Marcus offered a ‘defiantly Ethiopianist’ (Crummey 2001: 15) approach when claiming that ‘Ethiopia’s history contained an analytical truth [...]: from time to time, the nation had disintegrated into component parts, but it had never disappeared as an idea and always reappeared in fact’ (Marcus 1994: xii).

The narrative model of this historiographical reading reminds of the structure of many heroic narratives, where the protagonist has to repeatedly prove himself against enemies. For Messay, Ethiopian history is a ‘history of resistance’, ‘often against powerful invaders’ (1999: 57). More than internal conflicts, the hardships more often recalled in this ‘gloriously turbulent history’ (Markakis 1974: 1) are those coming from the outside: the 8th century Arabic territorial expansion in the Arab Peninsula and commercial expansion in the Red Sea area, the 16th/17th century Portuguese intrusion, the 16th/17th century Oromo migration, the 1529–1543 war against the Adal Sultanate, the 1868 British campaign against Tewodros, the war against the Sudanese Dervishes in the 1870s, the 1895-1896 Italian assault, the second Italian invasion in 1935, the 1977-1978 Somali conflict for the Ogaden. The idea of a country surrounded by enemies that, alone and unaided, managed against all odds to repel foreign invasions is a key feature of the encroachment syndrome characterising the Grand Narrative. It also produced the tendency to externalise the causes of the country’s problems. Foreign foes are blamed for directly causing Ethiopia’s periods of unrest, and the country’s perceived lack of progress is ascribed to the recurrent wars initiated by enemies.

Surrounded by enemies, its identity constantly under threat, Ethiopia nevertheless endured, and Grand Narrative scholars often wondered about the causes of what they saw as an extraordinary survival feat⁹⁰. Ethiopia’s ‘stubborn will to survive’ (Messay 1999: 243) amidst so many adversities has been a central object of enquiry for Ethiopian and foreign historians alike. Among foreign historians, the most famous example is probably Sven Rubenson’s *The survival of Ethiopian independence* (1976) and Haggai Erlich’s 1986 *Ethiopia and the challenge of independence*. Among Ethiopian historians, Messay Kebede’s *Survival and Modernization: Ethiopia’s enigmatic present* (1999) occupies a central place in the contemporary revival of the Grand Narrative. For Messay, Ethiopia’s survival has both political and cultural connotations:

Survival is not restricted to the preservation of Ethiopian independence, understood as a long history going back to Aksum with no record of foreign domination. This being one aspect of the question, survival has a wider meaning: it includes the protracted maintenance of Ethiopia’s political, socioeconomic, and cultural systems. Not only did Ethiopia always manage to remain independent, but it has also preserved almost intact

⁹⁰ In traditional and religious historiography, the explanation for Ethiopia’s survival was the covenant with God, which guaranteed the country divine protection throughout its history.

its social and cultural traditions despite a history fraught with turmoil (Messay 1999: xviii).

Even in terms of identity, continuity always prevailed. Ethiopia ‘preserved its traditions unchanged for centuries’ (Messay 1999: xxii) and contact with foreigners never resulted in new beliefs and social models being introduced in the country (Messay 1999: 57). Foreign invasions, Messay argues, had no impact on Ethiopia’s national personhood and left no cultural repercussions.

A crucial trait of the Grand Narrative is an essentialist concept of cultural identity. ‘Ethiopia’ is described as resolutely mono-cultural, its customs and beliefs universally shared and signifying one and the same thing for all individual Ethiopians (Sorenson 1993: 39). Identities are fixed, given, unscathed by the passing of time. The nation is spoken about as an immaterial entity that has a self-sufficient existence independent of the physical people who imagine it, compose it and take part in it. The nation is presented as a transcendental concept, ‘frozen’ and ‘static’ in time (Messay 1999: 56). Changes in the way Ethiopian identity is configured are betrayals of the essence of Ethiopianness. Identity must be maintained at all costs (Sorenson 1993: 75) and defended against ‘aberrations’ and ‘deviations’. Cultural purity is conceived as a value to defend, and indeed in the Grand Narrative metaphors abound describing processes of cultural hybridisation in terms of ‘pathology’ and ‘contamination’⁹¹.

The attitude towards identity is, in other words, strictly normative. Historiography is bent to defend values of indigeneity and antiquity, which in the Grand Narrative are guarantees of authenticity⁹². If something was in a certain way in the past, then it must remain in that way in the present, or be ‘restored’ to its original authenticity. Imported elements are considered less authentic, thus at the margins or outside of Ethiopianness. What departs from its original state is not genuine anymore; it is corrupted and consequently fake. What comes from the outside is equally unauthentic. External contributions to Ethiopian civilisation are minimised, in order to show that Ethiopian achievements are Ethiopian and Ethiopian only. Yet, the idea of an isolated Ethiopia closed-off from the rest of the world is denounced as a Eurocentric construct (Messay 2003a: 13). The logical solution is often to ‘indigenise’ elements coming from the outside,

⁹¹ Such are the reasons, for example, grounding much of the Grand Narrative’s hostility towards post-1991 ethno-federalist policies.

⁹² The values of indigeneity and antiquity find resonance in the narrative of Ethiopia as ‘the cradle of human kind’. The symbolic geography underpinning the Grand Narrative not only presents Ethiopia as the cosmological centre of the universe, but also posits it as the origin of humankind. Already before the 19th century Ethiopian and foreign sources maintained that the Garden of Eden was located in Ethiopia and that Adam and Eve spoke Geez. This postulation was seen to be confirmed with the discovery, in the 1970s, of one of the earliest and most complete fossilised skeletons of hominids (*Australopithecus afarensis*) in the Awash Valley. The remains of Lucy, in Amharic *Dənkənāš* (‘You amaze’ or ‘You are wonderful’), gave new resonance to the Grand Narrative’s celebration of the autochthonous, the original, and the authentic (Finneran 2013).

presenting them as intrinsically Ethiopian. Just like *externalisation* mechanisms outsource the causes of Ethiopia's trouble, *indigenisation* is also a widespread rhetorical strategy in the Grand Narrative. Both are based on a rigid differentiation between 'self' and 'other': in the case of externalisation, elements perceived as negative are exported from the self to the other, and in the case of indigenisation, elements perceived as positive are imported from the other to the self.

Identities are treated as supra-historical essences, inherently endowed with certain transcendental truths (such as the theological truth of Christianity) and holding the same meaning throughout time. Events and customs are scrutinised to reach the foundational core (the 'hub', Messay 1999: xvi) of Ethiopian civilisation. In the Grand Narrative, Ethiopian history is conjured up as an earthly manifestation of a transcendental Ethiopianness. Ethiopia is conceived as a historical *a priori*, and this 'antimaterialist paradigm' (Sorenson 1993: 72) is based on the assumption that it is not history that creates consciousness, but rather consciousness that creates history. The search for 'foundations' that remained true and valid throughout Ethiopian history⁹³ tends to flatten the present onto the past, and the past onto the present. Ethiopia is portrayed as a transhistorical entity that lives on despite the passing of time, or even *against* the passing of time. This leads to a historiographical oxymoron: the passing of time is an earthly, mundane affair unable to scathe the 'metaphysical nation'. In Messay's interpretation, for example, Ethiopia is the 'land of mummification' (1999: xviii) where 'history is tantamount to preservation rather than to succession of events and changes' (1999: 57). Ethiopia's history unfolds so regularly and predictably to appear almost uneventful: 'the concept of history, when applied to Ethiopia, is singularly devoid of all those exciting events besetting the history of other nations' (1999: 57). In cases like this, the Grand Narrative goes as far as denying historicity altogether.

Since historical events are just contingent on Ethiopia's metaphysical truths, the past is used to justify present-day ideologies and policies (Sorenson 1993: 44), and present-day ideologies and policies modify the interpretation of the past. The Grand Narrative is, for the most part, 'history written backwards' (Reid 2011: 110). This 'presentist fallacy' (Toggia 2008: 329) leads to a de-historicised use of the notions of 'borders', 'ethnicity' and 'nation', used in their contemporary (and often Western) meaning to refer to historical and cultural context where they had different semantic connotations. Toggia argues that the Grand Narrative treats the concepts of *māngəst* (state) and *bəherawi gəzat* (national territory) 'as static and frozen in time; and therefore, as paradoxical as it may sound, as suprahistorical concepts' (Toggia 2008: 321). The concept of 'Ethiopia' is projected back into the past in the same way, despite the fact that for centuries it hardly ever existed in its present meaning in the consciousness of historical

⁹³ For Messay, foundational are the will to survive and the notion of *ədəl* ('fate', 1999); for Mohammed Girma, covenant-thinking (2012) and the wax and gold tradition (2011); and for Maimire, 'surplus-history' and 'anamnesic solidarity' (2005-2006).

actors. Processes of historicisation are often rejected as methodologically irrelevant, and presentist types of analysis are sometimes consciously pursued on the explicit assumption that the ideal (the faithfulness to the 'spirit') is more important than the factual. Messay explicitly defends this approach, when in a declaration of methods, he affirms 'what matters [...] is not that facts justify the discourse, but whether the discourse is empowering, whether it organizes the world in such a way that it gives us strength, unity, and historical destiny' (2008b).

Unicentrism and exceptionalism

The *Kəbrä Nəgəst*, according to Messay, puts Ethiopia at the centre of the world: 'the historical scheme was designed in such a way that all things, including other countries' histories, march towards the realization of her [Ethiopia's] victory' (2013: 29). In other words, the *Kəbrä Nəgəst* predicts that 'world history was to conclude with Ethiopia's victory' (2013: 29). Claiming that Ethiopia's 'triumph' over other nations is both inevitable and will constitute the end of time is an example of the Grand Narrative's 'unicentric', in Pietro Toggia's words, conception of history and identity (Toggia 2008). The theological vision of Ethiopia as God's chosen is a key aspect of the Grand Narrative's 'historiographical self-assurance and cultural centrism' (Sorenson 1998: 240). This unicentricity is based on a reductionist way of narrating the history of the region from a narrowly restricted point of view – a state-centred, elite, Christian, male and *habäša* one. The sense of superiority attached to this particular perspective rests on the belief in Ethiopia's uniqueness and singularity.

The idea of an 'Ethiopian exceptionalism' systematises many of the different discursive components of the Grand Narrative and, for its explanatory power, is one the Grand Narrative's most defining features. The list of elements making up this perceived exceptionality is a familiar read for Ethiopian studies scholars. Antiquity is regarded as the first asset. Ethiopia has an 'unbroken' history of political independence and imperial rule, and is one of the first countries to have converted to Christianity. The long and 'uninterrupted' tradition of indigenous Christianity and state autonomy defines the country's distinctiveness. The exterior signs of this antiquity are equally held in high esteem: the stele at Aksum, the churches at Lalibäla, the monasteries on Lake Ṭana, the castles at Gondär. Religious chosenness is a second defining asset. The belief that Ethiopia is in a special covenant with God is a central source of Ethiopia's perceived uniqueness. Being referenced to in the Bible and hosting the Ark of the Covenant reinforce this mythical status. Indigenous creativity is described as a third aspect of the

country's exceptionality: a written language with its autochthonous script, a local calendar and musical notation system⁹⁴.

This all sums up to indicate, in the eyes of Grand Narrative intellectuals, that Ethiopia has a 'separate destiny' from all other nations. In one interpretation, this separate destiny is a 'messianic' one, based on the theological belief that 'God has reserved a special meaning or destiny to Ethiopia' (Messay 2013: 8). In other interpretations, the idea of 'separate destiny' has political, more than religious, undertones: 'the climax of the covenant, it is supposed, would become reality in the form of economic prosperity, political stability and national unity in the eschaton' (Mohammed Girma 2013: 184).

The notion of 'separate destiny' elicits the question: separate from the destiny of whom? In formulations of Ethiopian exceptionalism, the pole of comparison is almost always missing. At a first sight, it seems to coincide with the whole world, but, at a closer glance, it becomes apparent that this is not the case. Glorifying Ethiopia's ancient monuments, precocious state formation, indigenous calendar and writing system would not seem outstandingly exceptional when the pole of confrontation is the history of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. As for Asian history, it is almost never taken into account by proponents of Ethiopian exceptionalism. The implicit comparison appears then to be with Sub-Saharan Africa; only then it makes sense to emphasise Ethiopia's history of independence, Christianity, and other technological achievements such as a writing system and plough agriculture. Ethiopia's success is implicitly contrasted with the less successful histories of other Sub-Saharan African people. Sub-Saharan Africa is what Ethiopia's uniqueness is measured against, but Sub-Saharan African people are not the main addressees of the discourse of Ethiopian exceptionalism. On the one hand, the narrative of exceptionalism is directed at *habäša* people themselves, to boost their cultural confidence. But perhaps more significantly, it is directed at the West, to show that *habäša* history should not be denigrated like other African cultures. And indeed Ethiopian exceptionalism was systematised as a discourse at the beginning of 20th century, when contacts with Europe and Africa and knowledge about world history became more extensive. In this globalised context, Ethiopian exceptionalism acted firstly as a defensive discursive strategy against Western racism, as secondly as an identity marker. Within Africa, it sustained a

⁹⁴ In perhaps the most dazzling and exuberant affirmation of Ethiopian exceptionalism, Walelign Emiru (2007) names 41 reasons that make Ethiopia "the only or the first country in the world or in Sub-Saharan Africa" (2007: 68). Walelign borrows the Därg's slogan "Ethiopia first" to discuss the "*real* Ethiopia first", that is, the "cultural and technological achievements and natural resources that make Ethiopia *truly* first" (2007: 68, emphasis added). Alongside the most frequently cited elements, this list includes considerations like the following: the Ethiopians bake the softest and broadest bread in the world, *anjära* (number 34, 2007: 74); the first king who learnt how to drive a car was an Ethiopian, Mənilək II (number 20, 2007: 72); Ethiopia holds the Guinness Book's record in long hours laughing (number 29, 2007: 73); there are seven mammal species and seventeen bird species endemic to Ethiopia (number 36, 2007: 74); finally, perhaps the most bizarre statement, "Ethiopia is the only country that fought many battles against foreign invading forces and civil wars" (number 18, 2007: 72).

distinctive local identity vis-à-vis Pan-Africanist attempts to dilute regional particularism in favour of a continental sense of belonging.

Internal and external borders

The previous paragraphs allow us to define the Grand Narrative as based on two borders – an internal and an external one. These are not physical borders, but culturally-constructed spaces that act as markers of identity. They are, in other words, the two limits of otherness; not at all static, but variously delineated in personal and collective imageries. Their meaning shifted in time, both diachronically and synchronically, and successive Ethiopian rulers and intellectuals interpreted them in different ways. Despite this variation, the nature of these borders in the Grand Narrative is rather rigid, and each is used to enclose and define in essentialist terms a specific identity and history. Their presence was acutely felt in the whole period under consideration in this thesis, and even nowadays they dominate the Grand Narrative, although in a much more nuanced form. Both borders are based on the same exclusion mechanisms, and indeed the more solid the internal border was, the more solid was the external (see chapter 5); in the 1960s it is both the internal and the external border that were contested, and for the same reasons (see chapter 6).

The internal border defines a centre/periphery dynamic within the Ethiopian state, and establishes a hierarchy of identities within the country. It is a boundary that is created by, and in turn creates, power relations, both cultural, historical and, more crucially, political and economic. In the most common articulation, the one referring back to the *Kabrä Nägäst*, the internal border distinguishes Christians and non-Christians. In Mənilək II's famous definition, Ethiopia is 'a Christian island surrounded by a sea of pagans' (quoted in Sven Rubenson 1976: 393), a statement that very vividly pictures the perceived existence of a civilisational divide within the country's borders and within the Horn of Africa more broadly⁹⁵. The internal border sometimes takes up racial connotations (black vs. *ḵay*, red, the term most commonly used by *habäša* people to define their own skin colour, Taddesse Tamrat 1988: 5); sometimes territorial (highlands vs. lowlands); sometimes economic (agriculturalists vs. pastoralists); sometimes religious (Christianity vs. Islam, or Christianity and Islam together vs. paganism). Towards the end of the 19th century, the distinction between Semitic-speaking peoples and non-Semitic speaking peoples also acquired a central importance. All these dimensions are often seen to coincide: Semitic-speaking Christians settled into the northern highland plateau of the Horn,

⁹⁵ Recent research (Samuel Rubenson 2009) suggests that, while Mənilək's island metaphor has always been interpreted by historians as mirroring pre-existing feelings that were widespread among highlanders, it was in fact first designed by the Emperor to win the favour of the European governments he was writing to. Although Mənilək may have wished to exaggerate Ethiopia's heroic isolation, the statement does reflect the widely held idea of a highland identity whose integrity was defended over and over again against the threats of otherness and hybridisation.

while the lowlands to the south-west and south-east were inhabited by non-Semitic speaking groups, often Muslim or followers of traditional religions. Slave-raiding expeditions to lowland areas inhabited mostly by ‘pagan’ pastoralists were common⁹⁶, and physical features commonly associated with lowlands people (designed by the derogatory term *ṣanḳəlla*) came to be associated with slavery and low social status⁹⁷. The *habäša*, Belcher remarks, ‘have been invested in asserting that their sometimes lighter complexion and more ‘European’ features are the mark of superior ancestry’ (2012: 31). The internal border expands and contracts depending on the author, on his argument, on the immediate historical context.

However variously defined are the concepts of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’, these dichotomies, in their abstract form, remain at the core of the way the Grand Narrative describes Ethiopian history and identity. The Grand Narrative tends to ignore the history of multiculturalism and integration between different people within the highlands, and to portray Ethiopia’s heritage as evenly Christian and Semitic. This is not historically accurate, because ‘in spite of the preponderance of Christianity as a state religion and the dominance of the Semitic speaking group within a long narrow corridor stretching from the north to the central highlands, Abyssinia had historically been a heterogeneous society consisting of non-Semitic pagan and Muslim elements of equal historical standing’ (Hussein 1992: 16). Even within highland *habäša* culture, strong regional identities have always existed, not to mention the differentiation between Amharic- and Tigrinya-speakers, which played a crucial role in Ethiopian contemporary history⁹⁸. The tendency to construct antithetical binaries between centre and periphery, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ stresses difference and conflict, and minimises both the internal heterogeneity of the two poles and the history of cultural exchanges, trade and peaceful coexistence between them. Internal plurality is not accounted for and intercultural diversity is described only in terms of polarised and incompatible opposites.

⁹⁶ For a history of slavery in the Ethiopian lowlands and the history of its abolition see Gardiner (1933), Fieldhouse (1972), Iadarola (1975), Triulzi (1981), Donham (1986: 12ff), Fernyhough (1988), James (1988), McCann (1988), Miers (1997), Moore-Harell (1999), Abdussamad (1999), Allain (2006), Coleman (2008), Pankhurst (1964b, 1976, 1977 and 2011), and Whyte (2014). Asnake (2013: 58-74) compares the history of the western and eastern periphery. Recently, anthropologists of the lowlands have increasingly incorporated historiographical and archaeological methodologies (see González-Ruibal 2014) and have played an active role in giving more visibility to the legacies of slavery in public debates and public memory (for example González-Ruibal & Fernández Martínez 2007).

⁹⁷ Smidt notes in this regard that ‘the southwards expansion of aṣe Mənilək II directed against Oromo, Kāfa, and peoples further south was also perceived as a campaign of submission of the [*ṣanḳəlla*]. They were regarded as mere savages, without any socio-political order, who were only good for economic and physical exploitation. Consequently, folk paintings show them with drastically exaggerated features as brutish blacks following “pagan” and unholy rituals. A side-effect of this perception was that later governments did not establish a direct administration over much of the region until the 1960s, but made them subject only to raiding’ (2010: 526-527).

⁹⁸ See for example Taddia (1994b) and Tadesse Tamrat (1988).

The external border separates Ethiopia from the rest of the African continent. Its geographical position is much more fixed than the internal border: it circles the highland plateau to the west, south-west and south. Although it marks otherness in a way that is similar to the internal border, its existence is more recent. The internal border rests on the ideology put forward by the *Kəbrä Nägäst*; the second border probably started being conceptualised in the 19th century, when increased contact with Europeans brought to Ethiopia's intellectual sphere the geographical concept of 'Africa', as a continent to which Ethiopia was assumed to belong. This identification with Africa was externally imposed and stood in contrast with the self-perceptions of *habäša* people. According to Baxter, the *habäša* 'stressed their middle eastern, rather than African roots' (Baxter 1994: 167), and Finneran agrees that they 'tend to regard themselves as having middle-eastern rather than African antecedents' (Finneran 2003: 29). Ethiopia's external border firmly placed the country within the Middle Eastern cultural area, in the cultural basin where Abrahamic religions were born and developed, and away from Africa. Ethiopian exceptionalism, as seen in the last paragraph, is primarily geared towards upholding this border.

Local scholarship and foreign scholarship

When were the internal and external border first theorised, and by whom? Teshale (1996), Messay (2003a) and Daniel Alemu (2007) argue that 19th and 20th century Western scholars are chiefly responsible for the cultural construction of the two borders. They eloquently show how European scholarship read Ethiopian history with a very Semito-centric bias, assuming all great achievements of Ethiopian civilisation to be the work of 'Middle-Eastern' Semitic-speaking peoples, and diminishing the contributions of 'African' Cushitic-speaking people. The apparent anomaly of finding an 'advanced' civilisation like Abyssinia in the midst of the 'land of childhood [...] enveloped in the dark mantle of Night' (in Hegel's infamous definition) was explained by assuming that it was the product of Semitic-speaking people who migrated to the Horn from South Arabia. Indigenous people, classified as 'Cushitic', were described in this scholarship as primitive peoples, subjugated by the more advanced and sophisticated 'Semitic' immigrants. Ullendorff's argument that 'the South Arabians introduced [...] a vastly superior civilisation both material and cultural into Africa' (Ullendorff 1960: 5) well exemplifies this type of Western scholarship⁹⁹. Some Ethiopian historians perpetuated the same Semiticist bias. Taddesse Tamrat talks about the 'sabeanization' of Ethiopia as the 'crucial process of the confrontation between the culturally superior Arabian (or sabeanized) groups and the natives of the interior' (1972: 13). In later years, this bias has been widely contested in

⁹⁹ Messay's and Teshale's criticism of European Orientalist scholarship is influenced by Afrocentrism – or rather, it selectively appropriates those aspects of Afrocentrism useful to bolster Ethiopia's historical significance. Another example of this 'Afrocentric Ethiopian patriotism' is Ayele Bekerie's 1997 book on Geez, 'an African writing system'.

archaeology, and a vast array of recent studies ‘rightly emphasise the African roots of Ethiopian cultural achievements’ (Finneran 2003: 29)¹⁰⁰.

European knowledge on Ethiopia was a powerful influence on those Ethiopian historians who, like Taddesse Tamrat, studied abroad or who were taught by Westerners in Ethiopia. Teshale and Messay portray Ethiopian intellectuals as inert recipients of foreign knowledge and accuse them of having passively internalised Western biases and prejudices. Recent research, however, has questioned this argument, pointing instead at the discursive agency and representational power of the *habäša* through history. Wendy Belcher, for example, remarks that ‘the Habesha [...] have been engaged for more than two thousand years in sophisticated and systematic broadcasting about their exceptional origin, exemplary religion and ancient culture – broadcasting so successful that it has infused discursive formations far from East Africa’, including in Europe (Belcher 2012: 16). Contrary to Teshale’s and Messay’s depiction of Ethiopian knowledge as weak and acquiescent, Belcher argues that ‘so powerful have Habesha self-representations been that they have disseminated far beyond its shores and animated others’ representations of them’ (Belcher 2012: 24). Such discursive power ‘enabled [the *habäša*] to maintain and extend power over their neighbors and influence what distant foreigners thought’ (Belcher 2012: 16). What the Europeans knew about Ethiopia was shaped by *habäša* people’s own self-representations. The Western search for the origins of the *habäša* in southern Arabia was inspired by the Hamitic hypothesis¹⁰¹, with all its racist underpinnings, but was also ‘driven in part by the self-representations of the Habesha’ (Belcher 2012: 31). And in fact, ‘even as progressive European scholars attempted to disprove the problematic claim that the Habesha are special because they are not entirely African, the Habesha continued to circulate this very claim’ (Belcher 2012: 31).

The perception of a civilisational divide between different peoples of the Horn of Africa is embedded in indigenous *habäša* sources as much as being the product of Western scholarship. Many centuries before the institutionalisation of Semitic studies in Western universities, at a time when contacts between Ethiopia and Europe were far from extensive, Geez sources were already informed by a strong sense of *habäša* superiority (Teshale 1995: 13-18). The *Käbrä Nägäst*, just to mention the *habäša* national epic, is clear in indicating that the

¹⁰⁰ Schmidt (2006) details how archaeology has begun to question the idea of an ‘Ethio-Sabean state’. He points out that, contrary to the South Arabian hypothesis, new archaeological evidence suggests that ‘the origins of urbanism [in the northern part of the Horn of Africa] is likely independent of any foreign influence and is in fact an endogenous development’ (2006: 260).

¹⁰¹ The ‘Hamitic hypothesis’ was widely used outside of Ethiopian studies as well, to explain the presence of seemingly complex and developed societies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sanders 1969). In Rwanda the Tutsi were thought to be descendants of the Ethiopians or Europeans (the main proponent of this theory was John Hanning Speke in his 1863 *Journal of the discovery of the source of the Nile*). The Great Zimbabwe was assumed to be the product of a civilisation coming from the north (Pikirayi 2001, Fontein 2006).

reign of the Queen of Sheba was a Hamitic kingdom, inhabited by the descendants of Noah's son Ham (chapter 35 and 64). Mənilək I was the first Ethiopian king to be descendent from Shem via Solomon, and as such the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* is indeed the story of the Semiticisation of the Ethiopian ruling class. And that God favours the seed of Shem over the seed of Ham is specified in more than one passage. One example is in chapter 20: 'God gave the seed of Shem glory because of the blessing of their father Noah' (Budge 1922: 16). Another example is chapter 73: 'by the Will of God the whole of the kingdom of the world was given to the seed of Shem, and slavery to the seed of Ham, and the handicrafts to the seed of Japhet' (Budge 1922: 126). The Zagwe were described as non-Israelitis usurpers. Many historians have now discussed how widespread was in Geez sources the negative bias towards, for example the Oromo¹⁰² and Muslims¹⁰³. In conclusion, then, Ethiopian and Western intellectuals influenced one another through time, internalising and reinterpreting each other's scholarship. Indigenous discourses and foreign scholarship both contributed to defining and reproducing the internal and external borders.

Teleology

A poster at the National Museum of Addis Ababa (Figure 2) explains biological evolution as a series of morphological changes within a group of animals sharing 'family ties'. To further clarify this concept the poster presents side by side the evolution of the horse and the genealogy of Ethiopia's kings Mənilək and Haylä Səlasse. The comparison, rather misguided from the scientific point of view, is nevertheless particularly revealing in the context of the Grand Narrative. The idea of 'survival of the fittest' (not pictured but explained below in the same poster) reinforces the notion of survival and gives it the added connotation of betterment through time. The poster describes how the species that is the better-equipped to tackle the ever-changing challenges of its environment survives across time. The comparison with the Ethiopian monarchy (and the Solomonic lineage in particular) therefore implies not only that Ethiopia has proven fitter to survive than other nations, but also that it has gone through a process of continuous improvement. The Grand Narrative focuses indeed on the 'linearity of the state' (Toggia 2008: 321) and traces its progressive glories and achievements.

Two types of teleology inform the Grand Narrative. The first one is a transcendental type of teleology embraced, among others, by Messay. According to him, the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* has removed Ethiopia from cyclical time and located it in a rectilinear temporal trajectory, at the end of which is the Second Judgment:

¹⁰² Among others, Hultin (1996), Zitelmann (1996), Asafa (1998), Jeylan (2006), and Gusarova (2009).

¹⁰³ Among others, Abraham (1972), Gori (1991), Hussein (1992, 2006), Abbink (1998), and Desplat and Østebø (2013).

while all things are ruled by the law of repetition, only Ethiopia has a special fate. [The *Kəbrä Nəgäst*'s] message removes Ethiopia from the ups and downs by stating that she will vanquish all of her enemies and remain the last one standing. To put it another way, while kings rise and fall by turn, Ethiopia, because she has been delivered from cyclical time, will remain victorious and will 'live until the end of time' (Messay 2013: 27).

Because time will end with Ethiopia's triumph, Ethiopia is for Messay the very 'goal of universal history' and Ethiopians always have to bear in mind such 'destiny' and 'mission'.

The second type of teleology grounding the Grand Narrative is an immanent and secular one. It tells the coming-of-age story of the Ethiopian state, particularly in the 19th and 20th century. In the *Bildungsroman* of the Grand Narrative, Ethiopia's birth coincides with the legendary birth of Mənilək I and Ethiopia's maturity is achieved under Mənilək II, when the double processes of modernisation and centralisation led to the dawn of the present-day nation-state. It is these teleologically-framed processes of modernisation and state-building that Grand Narrative historians refer to when claiming, for example, that 'Emperor Tewodros II *initiated*, Yohannes IV *elaborated*, Menelik II *consolidated* and Haile Selassie I *completed* the process of transformation from parcellized sovereignties to centralized sovereignty' (Teshale 1995: 31)¹⁰⁴.

A major consequence of the teleological mode of reading history is that periods of foreign occupation or crumbling state control are treated as anomalous incidents and rarely studied *per se*. Moments like the *Zämänä Mäsafənt* or the Italian occupation are described as momentary interruptions briefly disturbing—but never completely truncating—the unfolding of Ethiopia's destiny as God's chosen nation (in the transcendental teleology) or as a sovereign state (in the secular/immanent teleology). Disaggregation, fragmentation, divisions are decried as detrimental, but seen as short-lived. Under the surface, Ethiopia is characterised, according to the Grand Narrative, by an inherent unity and cultural cohesion.

The unity of the transcendental nation

The Grand Narrative comes in many versions, but the notion of national unity (*andənnät*, lit. 'oneness') is essential to all of them. The concept of unity became particularly crucial for Ethiopian historians after the institutionalisation of the modern Ethiopian nation-state at the turn of the 20th century. When Mənilək gained prominence in Šəwan politics the Solomonic empire was mostly confined to the highlands regions of northern Ethiopia; by the time of his death in 1913 it incorporated vast territories of the lowlands regions of the Horn,

¹⁰⁴ Emphasis in the original. This perspective was representative of the nationalism of the early post-colonial period in Africa. According to Markakis, 'universally regarded as the political hallmark of modernization, nation building acquired an aura of pre-determination and inevitably derived from this connection; since modernization is inevitable, so is the success of this project' (2011: 354).

southwards, westwards and eastwards of the traditional highland core of the Abyssinian empire. Such newly-annexed territories were, for the most part, inhabited by Oromo, Afar, Somali, Kaffa, Nuer, Sidama, Konso, and other people ethnically, culturally and linguistically different from the Amhara conquerors. As a consequence of Mənilək's conquest, these people have been subjected to the rule of Addis Abäba ever since.

How were the new state borders to be justified? For the Grand Narrative, those borders were not at all new: the people within those boundaries had always had a common culture and had always shared a sense of nationhood. The nation was already there, and the international border treaties of the late 19th and early 20th century simply formalised what already existed in the collective imagination of local people. The Ethiopian nation has always existed, at the same time composite and one, and had always maintained the same geographic identity. From the perspective of the Grand Narrative, then Mənilək's 'expansion', as it is invariably described (Markakis 2011: 93), was the final stage in the struggle for the 'reunification' of Ethiopia. Mənilək's newly conquered borders were projected back in time as the ancient borders of the country. The Emperor had just restored what had always been the geographical identity of Ethiopia.

Historians of the Grand Narrative uniformly celebrated Mənilək's expansion as the moment in which Ethiopia finally regained its territorial unity (Markakis 2011: 6). But if Mənilək had to restore the original unity of Ethiopia, at what point in history was this unity broken? Many scholars assume this moment to be the Abyssinian-Adal war in the 16th century, and in fact, the insistence on this conflict is so extensive that, according to Erlich, one can veritably talk of an 'Ahmed Gagn syndrome' (Erlich 1994: 31). Nineteenth-century rulers presented themselves as restorers of a previously-existing state later disintegrated by the Gəñ, and this interpretation still dominates the Grand Narrative¹⁰⁵. The most prolific historian of the 1960s, Täklä-Şadək Mäkwəriya, repeatedly claimed that there is ample 'documentary evidence' that 'the southern regions of Ethiopia (Hararge, Sidamo and the areas settled by the Oromo) had been part of Ethiopia from the time of Aksum [...] until the rise of Gəñ Ahmed' (1988-1989: 211, quoted in Teshale 1995: 41). Commenting on this passage, Teshale deems 'ludicrous' to assert that 'Aksumite civilization, whose territorial extent at its largest was confined to what is now Eritrea, Tigray, Northern Wallo and at times parts of Arabia, could have in any ways included Sidamo and Hararge, far south of Zagwe territory' (1995: 41). Täklä-Şadək's reasoning presents at least three main problems.

¹⁰⁵ Among foreign scholars, Mordechai Abir's *Ethiopia, the Era of Princes: the challenge of Islam and the reunification of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855* (1968) encapsulates, since its title, both the 'reunification thesis' and the encroachment syndrome typical of the Grand Narrative's representation of Islam.

First, the presence of a pre-existing nation that Mənilək simply reunited was justified by Grand Narrative historians on the grounds of the long-standing relationships of tribute and trade existing in the area. Some autonomous or semi-autonomous polities had been paying tributes to the highland Abyssinian Empire, and Grand Narrative historians claimed this was proof that these regions were already subject to Solomonic authority even before Mənilək ‘formalised’ their incorporation in the empire. Up to the mid-19th century, though, being ‘tributary to’ did not necessarily mean ‘under the control of’ (Reid 2007: 241). Terms like ‘subject to’ and ‘tributary to’, argues Reid, are ‘frustrating and unsatisfying umbrella terms used to describe –and disguise– a wide range of political, diplomatic and military relationships, varying degrees of influence and/or control, and levels of short- and long-range regional suzerainty or hegemony’ (Reid 2007: 241).

Second, the reunification thesis is often based on post-Westphalian concepts of sovereignty that had little relevance in pre-19th century Ethiopia¹⁰⁶. The 19th century in Ethiopia saw a profound reconfiguration of ideas of statehood, and Ethiopian rulers were quick in recognising the opportunities offered by the European nation-state system. The territorial claims of 19th century rulers found legitimation, once again, in the *Kəbrä Nəgəst*, which accurately describes Ethiopian borders stretching as far as Jerusalem¹⁰⁷, but this territory had been conceived by pre-19th century Ethiopian elites more like a cultural and ideological sphere of influence than a land to administrate and control militarily. The penetration of new ideas of statehood linked to territorial control began surfacing in the reign of Yohannəs IV, who in 1872 started signing his correspondence as ‘King of Kings of Ethiopia and all its territories’ (Crummey 1988: 26). Crummey comments that ‘this was the first time in the self-descriptions of her princes in their 19th-century correspondence that Ethiopia became a territorial question as well as a cultural and a political one’ (Crummey 1988: 26).

Third, the reunification thesis is supported by showing the numerous interactions (especially in terms of trade) and cultural similarities between the different parts of the soon-to-be state. But these were only *some* of the interactions and similarities between the different people of the Horn, posthumously selected among many to demonstrate, in a circular reasoning, the existence of an overarching Ethiopian identity. Contacts and exchanges between people who are now based in different states go conveniently unmentioned. A shared sense of nationhood emerged, in these accounts, only when trade happened between those communities now accommodated under a single state. This line of argument also ‘shies away from the abounding

¹⁰⁶ The political configuration of Abyssinian Empire is perfectly in line with the patterns of state formation in pre-colonial Africa. In a continent where population density was very low and land was abundant, it was control over people, rather than territory, that sat at the core of state building attempts (Lonsdale 1981, Herbst 2000). For an analysis of the process of Ethiopian state formation, see Makki (2011)

¹⁰⁷ Chapter 15 and chapter 92.

dissimilar traits amongst the peoples of later-day Ethiopia [...] and deemphasizes the wars waged between the same peoples' (Semir 2009a: 381).

Mənilək's new state borders were justified not only based on the assumption that they represented the 'authentic' borders of the Ethiopian polity, but also on the grounds that the people conquered by Mənilək had always felt 'Ethiopian'. Ethnic, religious, gender, class, regional identities were everywhere secondary, Grand Narrative historians argued, compared to the primary allegiance everybody bore towards the 'Ethiopian nation'. In a now-infamous article that encapsulates most of the core assumptions of the Grand Narrative, Getatchew Haile claims 'most anthropologists agree that ethnicity is meaningless in the Ethiopian context because of the long process of integration and racial mixing' (Getatchew 1986: 474), and indeed for him 'racism or tribalism is unknown in the Ethiopian political administration, past or present' (1986: 474). Getatchew admits a power imbalance when observing that Geez and later Amharic were the languages of power, but the process of 'national integration' (not otherwise defined or substantiated) pushed many people to learn Amharic and abandon their 'tribal language' (1986: 472). As a consequence, Amharic has been 'the non-tribal national language for centuries' (1986: 474).

This model of nationhood is based on a very strong hierarchical vision. *Habäša* culture is the true representative of Ethiopianness, and subsidiary 'tribal' cultures thrive under its roof. Amhara is not an ethnicity, but the true face of the nation, the bearer of national unity. Amharic and Geez are pan-national languages, able to accommodate and represent everyone. *Habäša* heritage is compared to a mother, welcoming in its protective arms all the small children living with her. This is the preferred metaphor used by writers, scholars and artists to promote the Grand Narrative conception of nationhood. Example are numerous, the most famous being Afäwärk Täklä's 1963 painting 'Mother Ethiopia' (Figure 3)¹⁰⁸. A Christian *habäša* woman is made to embody the nation, the contours of the image forming the silhouette of a map of Ethiopia¹⁰⁹. The woman's vest represents Ethiopia's landscape, in a complete identification of the spiritual body of the nation with its physical territory. In a process of metaphorical transubstantiation, Ethiopia's mountains, valleys, lakes and other geographical features become organic. In this symbolic cartography, the body of the nation is God-sent and holy. The character of Mother Ethiopia, after all, is the same character that is drawn to figuratively represent the already-quoted biblical line 'Ethiopia shall stretch her hands to God' (Psalms 68: 31). This type of allegorical representation has significant political implications, as it hints that

¹⁰⁸ The motif of Mother Ethiopia is an ancient one in Ethiopian art.

¹⁰⁹ This symbolic reading of Ethiopian territory is to be found in many other paintings. I was struck, for its political implications, by a painting exhibited in the St. Georges' cathedral's museum, where Mother Ethiopia, embracing a child, sits above a map of the Horn in which the borders of Ethiopia also include, tellingly, present-day Eritrea and Somalia.

groups advocating secession want to amputate the body of the nation – or even worse, to amputate the body of their own mother. And because the painting cannot but remind of the Virgin and child, thus reaffirming the identification of the nation with Christianity, secessionists are accused to be willing to amputate the body of the Mother of Christ. This painting then, just like many cultural artefacts and historiographical accounts of the 1960s, suggests that those who objected to Haylä Səlassə's centralisation policies were not only political traitors, but heretics and sinners altogether. In the ever-polarised and ever-politicised field of Ethiopian historiography, contesting this assumption is interpreted as working towards the violent disintegration of Ethiopia's unity. Those who criticise Ethiopia as a nation, Grand Narrative historians retort, only defend their own 'petty interests and insularity' (Messay 2003a: 17); they cannot see the greater collective good and cannot see the dangers of the narrow particularism they propose¹¹⁰. The Grand Narrative is, in this sense, 'a perfect example of a state-centered historiography that treats alternative interpretations of history as a threat to the State and the cohesiveness of the nation' (Vezzadini & Guidi 2013: vii).

Clashing historiographical narratives: contesting exceptionalism and borders

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, the Ethiopian victory at Adwa in 1896 is an essential element of the Grand Narrative. Adwa was seen to confirm Ethiopian exceptionalism: the first encounter with colonialism was a victory for Ethiopia, which retained its independence while all other African regions were falling under the control of European powers. Although the belief in Ethiopia's exceptionalism had been feeding patriotic feelings throughout the country's history, Adwa signalled the rise of a different kind of nationalism. Pre-1896 patriotism preceded the establishment of the present-day borders of Ethiopia. Mənilək's call to arms in 1895 led to an immediate mobilisation in most of the Empire's provinces: 'at the crucial moment', Sven Rubenson notes, 'Menelik commanded the loyalty of every important chief in the country' (1976: 107). The political cohesion with which Ethiopia was seen to have responded to the Italian invasion was interpreted as the proof of the existence of a shared sense of 'Ethiopianness' – giving credit to the idea that Mənilək had simply politically reunified an already-existing nation¹¹¹. The victory at Adwa gave Mənilək the diplomatic authority to sanction the newly-delineated borders, and was thus perceived in the Grand Narrative as the birth of an Ethiopian nation-state. In the eyes of the cultural and political elite in Addis Abāba,

¹¹⁰ Among many possible examples, see Solomon Gashaw (1993), Heran (1994) and Takkele (1994) for an extensive formulation of this 'unionist' argument. Solomon's chapter in *The rising tide of cultural pluralism* immediately precedes another chapter, by Herbert Lewis, that gives voice instead to the grievances of the peripheries (Lewis 1993); reading the two chapters together gives a good sense of the two positions in the unionist/regionalist debate.

¹¹¹ See for example Getatchew Haile, 'Adwa is where Ethiopia's unity was demonstrated to the outside world' (1986: 468)

Adwa firmly placed Ethiopia among the world's independent and sovereign nation-states, starkly differentiating it from the rest of Africa. Adwa became one of the founding myths of modern Ethiopianist nationalism.

Yet, the more time went on, the more a distance grew between the expected glory of the country and the reality of its perceived underdevelopment. Ethiopia's 'separate destiny' started to be seen as a burden rather than a privilege. Adwa became then a broken promise, and the patriotism it kept inspiring became infused with a sense of unfulfillment. The separate destiny was perceived as a 'separate decline' by some intellectuals, creating a mixed-feeling nationalism based on pride but also on frustration. Referring to first- and second-generation thinkers in the pre-1936 period, Bahru argues that

in their critique of the backward state of their country, the intellectuals represented a counter-current to the smug confidence that has ensued after the Adwa victory. They advocated a series of reforms in order to give socio-economic content to the political independence that Adwa had guaranteed (1991: 110).

These contrasting feelings of pride and frustration characterised Ethiopian nationalism ever since, infusing it with a basic ambivalence. Ethiopian intellectuals came to be driven

by the cognitive dissonance between an inherited sense of cultural superiority and acute awareness of Ethiopian 'backwardness', by contrast not only with the European states [...] but even with colonized African people whom they were accustomed to treat with scorn (Clapham 2006: 141).

In the early 20th century, then, 'the imagination of the nation that was replete with exceptionalism reduced sentiments of alterity just as it exacerbated its sensitivity' (Elizabeth 2010: 92). Ethiopian political theorists approached the idea of nation with both patriotism and disappointment at the same time. Alongside the Grand Narrative, the feeling of frustration, of 'separate decline', imbued Ethiopian historiography in a less open, but yet perceivable way. In the case of the first three generations of intellectuals, the disillusionment emerges here and there in their works, but it is never taken up and discussed in a systemic way. Development and modernisation were future projects writers continued to believe in. They sometimes expressed the fear that Ethiopia was lagging behind, but never believed the country had missed out on modernisation altogether. In general, though, the intellectuals were so immersed in Ethiopia's mainstream nationalist rhetoric that paradigm shifts away from the Grand Narrative were unlikely. These feelings of decline appeared to have been constantly repressed, whether consciously or unconsciously. All together, they contribute to conceptions of history that went decidedly against the Grand Narrative. Rather than following the teleological unfolding of Ethiopia's unique destiny of glory, such counter-historiographies emphasise ruptures, gaps, and

failures. While the Grand Narrative chronicles the past glories of the Ethiopian state, these counter-histories look at those past glories with disillusionment, as many broken promises in the history of the country. The focus is on the things Ethiopia could have become, and did not become, unable to live up to its celebrated history. The counter-historiographies contest some of the key elements of the Grand Narrative: its cultural centrism and exceptionalism, for example, together with the transhistorical view of the nation as always-already existing.

In the period under consideration (1900s-1960s), the two perspectives existed alongside each other. The Grand Narrative was dominant, in full view, officially endorsed by *Ras Tāfāri/Haylā Səlassə* and championed by the vast majority of intellectuals close to him. The historiographies of disillusionment were running underground, constantly suppressed, but emerging at key moments in the biography of some authors or key moments in the history of the country. One of these moments is the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Ethiopian historiography goes through a profound ‘representational crisis’ (Toggia 2008: 320).

Challenges to the Grand Narrative came from the periphery and from within the centre alike. One powerful kind of counter-historiography was proposed by representatives of ethnic and religious groups traditionally excluded from power. Scholars belonging to cultures confined to the periphery of Ethiopianness denounced the Grand Narrative as the legitimisation tool of regimes that maintained their grip on power via oppressive policies of centralisation and cultural assimilationism. The question was asked by David Levine whether Mənilək’s imperial expansion was ‘a subjugation of alien people or an ingathering of peoples with deep historical affinities’ (1974: 26), and although Levine famously opted for the second explanation, after his *Greater Ethiopia* was published in 1974 the historiography of the region increasingly answered in the first way. Mənilək’s expansion was interpreted as internal colonialism, just like Haylā Səlassə’s 1962 annexation of Eritrea was interpreted as a colonialist move. From the 1970s onwards, the counter-historiographies, now embraced by various armed liberation movements, became much harder to ignore or repress. They gained international visibility and internal legitimacy. At present, they hold a considerable weight in the country’s national narrative.

But counter-historiographies were also articulated from within the Amhara-Christian centre, even before the rise of the Ethiopian student movements, and these internal reassessments, more subtle than external challenges, are seldom noticed by critics of Ethiopian historiography. We have already mentioned that the works of early 20th century intellectuals were dotted with occasional outpourings of disappointment and frustration, which nevertheless never concretised in a systematic reappraisal of the Grand Narrative. The scepticism towards the Grand Narrative remained alive in the consciousness of Ethiopian historians, and in later decades began being articulated much more openly. Historians like Messay openly admit their disillusionment. His work, he declares, ‘reflects my ongoing effort to understand the causes of

Ethiopia's *failure* to become a prosperous and stable modern nation' (2008a: vi)¹¹². The question was asked with increased frequency and urgency: what went wrong in Ethiopian history? Ethiopia had an ancient indigenous tradition of Christianity, state-building, and cultural achievements such as a rich written literature that made it stand out from the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. So why did it end up as poor as, or even poorer than other African countries?

The issue of *failure*¹¹³ seems to inform the work of all Ethiopian historians disenchanted with the Grand Narrative¹¹⁴. It is also a question that resonates broadly among urban educated Ethiopians, as I could ascertain during my fieldwork. Providing an answer has become one of the key intellectual priorities of contemporary Ethiopian scholarship, both at home and in the diaspora. Internet forums and social networks are among the privileged spaces where the Ethiopian diaspora engages in discussion, and questions about 'what went wrong' abound. An abstract of mine citing the 'failure of the reformist movement in early 20th century Ethiopian political philosophy', was copied and pasted from the SOAS website, where it was originally published, onto the website Ethiopian News Forum, and generated a multiple-page thread over what could have been the causes of such failure. Users commented that the destiny of glory promised by the Grand Narrative and the status of God's chosen are now impossible to have faith in. The reality of the country's perceived underdevelopment underscores a seemingly unbridgeable gap between Ethiopia and modernity – that modernity that most intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century were optimistic to achieve in their near future.

The Grand Narrative, though, is far from having lost its prestige, and finds a contemporary formulation, for example, in the new developmentalist version of Ethiopian nationalism. The current, EPRDF-sponsored patriotism prides itself on Ethiopia's double-digit economic growth, infrastructural projects and rapid urban development. In state-sponsored discourse, shiny skyscrapers and the colossal Millennium Dam are the new rock-hewn churches and the new Fäsilädäs castles. Proponents of the Grand Narrative have a passion for the monumental and the grandiose, both in art and in historical description, and images of the Millennium Dam now appear on government diplomatic and touristic publications side by side with the long-established symbols of Ethiopian nationalism, such as the Aksum stele. Grand Narrative-type of rhetoric has not abandoned the realm of political oratory either. The 2007 Ethiopian millennium was celebrated by the then prime minister Meles Zenawi with the

¹¹² Emphasis added.

¹¹³ See chapter 4.

¹¹⁴ The perceived discrepancy between a glorious past and a disappointing present was also used by foreign commentators to ironise on the country's backwardness. Kay Torrance, assistant director of public information at the Carter Centre commented that the May 2005 election in Ethiopia was 'only the third in its 3,000-year old history' (Torrance 2005). Donald Yamomoto, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, similarly said of the election that it 'marked the first, true multiparty election in Ethiopia's 3,000 year history' (2006).

following statement: ‘it is [...] with a keen sense of our historical mission that I call upon you today to stay the course of the Ethiopian renaissance, to continue to work hard to make our current reality a mere footnote in our long and glorious history’ (quoted in Toggia 2008: 323-324). Albeit recognising the shortcomings of the Grand Narrative, historians and politicians proved wary of dismissing it altogether, fearing the loss of identity this would entail.

Old critical paradigms are therefore still very much present nowadays in Ethiopian scholarship. Rather than radical paradigm shifts, in Ethiopian historiography there was a progressive accumulation of new historical conceptions on top of old ones. No metanarrative was abandoned and overcome once for all. Researchers of Ethiopian history nowadays have many different theoretical frameworks at their disposal, plus a consistent body of theory that reflects over the direction Ethiopian historiography ought to take. Yet, these different discursive strata have not yet been integrated, and at present they exist side by side, as many alternative interpretations of Ethiopia’s past. The antagonism between them is not merely theoretical, as unicentric perspectives and ethnonationalist ones support contrasting political claims. From a theoretical point of view these interpretative options seem to remain antithetical; Ethiopian historiography has been heavily criticised, but is yet to be reconstructed according to different, more inclusive criteria.

The role of the ‘colonial’ in Ethiopian historiography

Redefining the ‘colonial’

This thesis argues that there is another characteristic of the Grand Narrative that so far has gone unnoticed by scholars: its *acoloniality*. ‘Coloniality’ and the ‘colonial’ are here defined as a system of economic, political, and ideological power relations defining one’s relationship with cultural alterity. The Grand Narrative is structured around the attempt to negate, belittle or assimilate alterity. Otherness is conceived in terms of difference and conflict, if not outright as a threat. We have already noted how this affected the representation of cultural groups such as the Oromo, the Agaw, Muslims and the Falashas. For Belcher, ‘the Habesha’s success in projecting themselves as exceptional has come at the tremendous cost of others’ (Belcher 2012: 31). Hussein comments that ‘the Muslims of Ethiopia have been consistently described at second hand, through the eyes of some other group — generally from the point of view of those who had political and ideological reasons to see them as foreign to Ethiopia itself’ (Hussein 1992: 19). In the Ethiopian chronicles, Muslims were described with ‘hostile bias’ as ‘outsiders by definition’ (Hussein 1992: 19). Whenever conflict is narrated, Abyssinia’s adversaries are rarely given a voice; their motivations are seldom explored in detail; their history before and after their attack on Ethiopia is even more infrequently accounted for. Quirin calls this perspective ‘instrumentalist’ (1993: 201) as ‘other peoples – if examined at all – were

regarded merely as objects of conquest and presumed assimilation’ (1993: 200). The following statement by Zewde Gebre Selassie has come under particular attack for its one-sided view of the region’s history: ‘the central theme of Ethiopian history [...] has been the maintenance of a cultural core which has adapted itself to the exigencies of time and place, assimilating diverse people’ (Zewde 1975: 1). Teshale effectively sums up the Grand Narrative’s (‘Aksumite paradigm’ in his terminology) view of alterity in the following terms:

The Aksumite paradigm is one that claims a triple supremacy for the Ge’ez civilization over those outside its cultural embrace: superiority of its civilization over ‘Others’ barbarism; superiority of its *tabot* Christianity over ‘Others’ heathenism; and superiority of its Ge’ez script over ‘people without writing’. Armed thus, the Aksumite paradigm articulated a consciousness of having a History, which ‘Others’ lack (Teshale 1995: 14).

Yet, this reductionist perspective on otherness cannot be reduced merely to ethnocentrism or cultural chauvinism, as some scholars have suggested, though both ethnocentrism and cultural chauvinism play a role in some variants of the Grand Narrative. It is rather linked to a deeper preoccupation with unity and identity at societal level – a negotiation of the meaning of political community that all societies are concerned with. Abbink highlights the ‘inherent problem of ‘national integration’’ in the following terms:

central monarchical rule and its extension over steadily increasing areas with diverse religious and ethnocultural groups increased the challenge of a unitary discourse and an overarching national identity. This issue was never resolved but only controlled and managed, with violent means if need be (Abbink 1998: 115).

Alemseged talks about the imperial era as characterised by the fear that ‘extending autonomy to the various components of the empire [...] would not keep the country united; it would undo it’ (Alemseged 2010: 279). From the forced religious conversions ordered by Tewodros and Yohannēs to create a homogeneously Christian empire to Haylā Sēlasse’s policy of Amharisation (see chapter 5), Ethiopian rulers considered cultural uniformity as the necessary condition of political cohesion. Sameness was seen as one of the main factors of social aggregation, and a condition for the very same existence of a community, and thus a polity.

The other element of our definition of coloniality is that it is a system of economic, political and ideological power relations. In this case too, the Grand Narrative largely overlooks, if not deliberately tries to negate, power relationships. This is primarily linked to the transcendental vision of identity, nation and history. Power relationships between classes, genders and cultures are deeply embedded in context-specific historical processes, and are a result of the complex interaction of a wide variety of locally-rooted factors. The

transcendentalism of the Grand Narrative, which often goes as far as negating historicity, is ill-fitted to account for the temporal and spatial specificity of power and its pervasive presence at the micro and macro historical level. Analyses of power relations, oppression, discrimination, even racism are substituted in the Grand Narrative by an almost exasperated militarism celebrating the epic battles between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘just rulers’ and ‘bad rebels’ (such as Queen Yodit) or ‘bad rulers’ and ‘just rebels’ (such as in the rise of Tewodros), depending on who is seen to be fighting to preserve and restore the unity of the state. The violence carried out by the state ‘was often seen as an almost inevitable outcome of central state-builders’ quest to modernize and pacify the supposedly backward and unruly periphery’ (Hagman 2014: 726). In the Grand Narrative, identities are not seen as constructed by agents in a specific cultural milieu and historical setting. Presenting identity as fixed and unchanging ignores the bottom-up agency of individual historical actors, with their particular interests, grievances and objectives.

Power relations get eclipsed as a result of the Grand Narrative’s ideologically-driven approach, which ignores the material vicissitudes of the past unless they can be used to buttress the political ideals, civic values and ethical principles that the historians had since the beginning intended to shore up. According to Sorenson, most narrative constructions of history in the country ‘tend towards a process of retrospective projection that defines the national self’ (1993: 38). Historiography becomes, in this sense, the selective appraisal of the past used to justify present configurations. A lot of European historians are surprised by the extent to which ‘history is alive’ in Ethiopia. Jesman defines Ethiopia as ‘burdened by its past’ (Jesman 1963: 1). Triulzi emphasises this even more by arguing that Ethiopia is a country ‘overburdened by its past’ where ‘memory has won over history’ (2002: 280). Triulzi again observes that ‘researching the country’s past has been perceived, and is often practised, by several authors not as a mere advance in scholarly knowledge but as a direct intervention in the country’s history, and a rightful step in the direction of a brighter future’ (2002: 281). In the Grand Narrative, then, history is ‘constructed only out of the elements which fit the living and the elements which do not fit are reshaped (re-interpreted, re-evaluated) until they fit or they are rejected and simply excluded from what is handed on to a next generation’ (Schlee and Shongolo 2012: 170). The negation of alterity and cancellation of power relations from historical analysis are the main consequences of this presentist, transcendental and ideologically-driven reading of the past. The colonial in the Grand Narrative goes unaccounted for, and it is this acoloniality that the next paragraph sets out to qualify.

The ‘colonial’ in the Grand Narrative

In the Grand Narrative, the concept of the ‘colonial’ is conspicuous for its forced absence. It has an immense mass and gravity, but is made to remain invisible. Ethiopian intellectuals belonging to the Ethiopianist historiographical tradition constantly try to expel the

concept of coloniality from their theoretical and cultural space, in an attempt to present Ethiopian identity as acolonial. The term acolonial has here been preferred to ‘anticolonial’ and ‘extracolonial’ because it implies absence of coloniality, and thus expresses quite precisely the results of the process of negation, removal and eradication of the colonial typical of the Grand Narrative. ‘Anticolonial’ is imprecise for its reference to liberation movements in colonised Africa, but also, more broadly, because it connotes an ideological antagonism that is not to be found in the historiographical attitudes of Ethiopian intellectuals, who mostly ignore or neglect to consider, more than oppose, coloniality. ‘Extracolonial’ implies a space outside of colonialism, and the fact that Ethiopia was the only traditional polity in Sub-Saharan Africa to have escaped European colonialism is generally assumed to validate thinking of Ethiopia in these terms. One of the central premises of this thesis, however, is that Ethiopian history is far from being extra-colonial; on the contrary, the concept of Ethiopian nationhood came to be defined by successive ideological and physical encounters with colonialism and by their successive conceptualisation in Ethiopian political thought. As argued in the next chapters, the colonial permeates the perception, representation and theorisation of Ethiopia’s history and identity. And yet, it is never explicitly taken up or spoken about; it orients Ethiopian theoretical elaborations, but in a hidden way. Its presence can only be assumed by looking at its effects on Ethiopian thought and nationalist discourse. Despite its invisibility, the concept is pivotal to understand the various historiographical interpretations of Ethiopia’s past.

This thesis argues that the Grand Narrative and the counter-historiographies are characterised by antithetical relations to the concept of the colonial. Coloniality plays a major role in both the Grand Narrative and the counter-historiographies, but in opposite ways: it is constantly suppressed in the Grand Narrative on the one hand, and articulated, made explicit object of reflection in the underground counter-historiographies on the other hand. Of all the elements of the Grand Narrative, the counter-historiographies challenge precisely the Grand Narrative’s theorisation of an acolonial history and its belief in the possibility of pursuing an acolonial modernity. In stark contrast with the Grand Narrative, the underground counter-narratives are permeated by the dimension of the colonial. Their purpose is precisely to *recolonise* the Grand Narrative and bring colonialism and its consequences back to visibility. Oppositional historiographical readings denounce the Grand Narrative’s forced acoloniality as an artificial ideological façade which hides the extent to which Ethiopian history is, in fact, imbued by the colonial. Various times in Ethiopian history the Grand Narrative lost its hegemony and the counter-history gained a new prominence. In these historical moments, the colonial is brought back into the national and historiographical consciousness, its meaning renegotiated and its importance reinstated.

Chapter 3 – Imperial political thought

The Grand Narrative and the challenges of the 20th century

Ethiopian political thought, as discussed in the Introduction, has so far been studied through Western concepts and terminology. Labels like ‘progressive’, ‘radical’ and ‘conservative’ have been applied to the Ethiopian context without being problematised, historicised or contextualised, and created more theoretical confusion than they clarified. This chapter objects to this framework, arguing that the use of Western political terms has proven profoundly inadequate to understand Ethiopian political ideas. A much more significant dimension to understand the history of Ethiopian political thought, the chapter argues, is the position of Ethiopian intellectuals in relation to internal narratives, and especially in relation to the Grand Narrative. As argued in the last chapter, after the battle of Adwa the Grand Narrative reached its final discursive form, and, in its new configuration, remained by and large the hegemonic form of state nationalism until the late 1960s. The Grand Narrative dominated the political thought of the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals. The way Ethiopian thinkers appraised, adopted, promoted or rejected Western ideas is marginal, in terms of theoretical weight and practical effects, compared to their identification with the Grand Narrative.

The main theoretical undertaking of first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals was how to revitalise the legacy of the Grand Narrative in the changed socio-political environment of the new century. The thinkers that historians so far referred to as the ‘progressives’ (the Introduction has already questioned this designation) were admittedly more inclined to negotiate some aspects of the Grand Narrative, but these updates were geared towards making the Grand Narrative capable of withstanding the trials of the contemporary period. This already highlights a first problem with the notion of ‘progressivism’, since aspects of European liberal thought were embraced with the purpose of reinforcing an already-existing monarchy-grounded religious nationalism. In this light, even the so-called ‘progressives’ moved in fact within the domains of what, in a Western political framework, would be labelled socio-cultural conservatism. Following these observations, this chapter rejects the use of Western categories and establishes a theoretical framework for the study of Ethiopian political thought based on indigenous Amharic terminology. It focuses in particular on the concept of *zāmānawinnät*, which usually translates, albeit imprecisely, the term ‘modernity’.

Two were the main problems faced by pro-*zāmānawinnät* thinkers in their attempt to adapt the Grand Narrative to the challenges of the 20th century. First was the issue of how to integrate the Grand Narrative with the reality of the international system of states and market economies Ethiopia had recently joined. Second was whether to integrate the Grand Narrative

with the ideological apparatus attached to this international system, and above all the narratives of modernity and progress. It was around the core components of the Grand Narrative that debates concentrated: the function of the monarchy in the context of new normative ideas of statehood, the notion of unity in the context of Ethiopia's multi-ethnic state, the role of religion as an instrument of political (and particularly monarchical) legitimation, the significance of Christianity as a founding principle of public morality and the law, and the value of Ethiopian exceptionalism in relation to the growing narratives of Pan-Africanism and black nationalism. The necessity to ideologically situate Ethiopia in the rapidly-globalising international environment, an environment to which Ethiopian intellectuals were exposed in drastically higher numbers and to a drastically more extensive degree than in the past, gave a renewed prominence to philosophical debates about identity and alterity. The theme of the 'colonial', as defined in the previous chapter, informs and structures all these debates, and is thus the key to understand both the philosophical premises of *zämänawinnät* and the failure (*käšäfa*) of pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals. There were degrees of variation, of course, from thinker to thinker, but nevertheless it is possible to identify some general trends that run through most of Ethiopian political thought up to the 1960s. The chapter highlights these continuities and commonalities – such as the widespread rejection of individualism, the insistence on the need of a transcendental moral order, and the defence of social hierarchies.

Defining *zämänawinnät*

The concept of *zämänawinnät* is a central one in the history of Ethiopian political thought, and needs careful unpacking. As a general overview, *zämänawinnät* had in Ethiopia a much more restricted meaning compared to that of 'modernity' in the West. Ethiopian intellectual elites concentrated their attention to fewer theoretical issues than their contemporary European counterparts. Ethiopian thinkers discussed *ləmat* (another key term meaning 'growth', 'development') by incorporating some aspects of Enlightenment philosophy – most notably, the idea of the liberating power of knowledge, conceived as rational inquiry. Yet, other central topics of Enlightenment philosophy, such as democracy, universal suffrage, free thought, the separation of powers, the notion of social contract, and the definition of universal human rights and civil liberties, proved not to be of particular relevance for Ethiopian thinkers. Economic topics too were seldom discussed in Ethiopia, with Gäbrä Həywät being virtually the only intellectual to deal with economic matters in a certain degree of detail¹¹⁵. The modernisation envisioned by Ethiopian thinkers was of a capitalist kind, but the transition towards a market economy was almost always alluded to in generic terms. Pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals mostly identified *ləmat* with the decline of poverty, with the rise of literacy, with improvements in the position of women, slaves and peasants, and, even more prominently, with technological and

¹¹⁵ Gäbrä Həywät's economic thought has been studied in depth by Alemayehu (2003)

industrial advancement. This paragraph identifies four general trends in the way the term *zämänawinnät* was used in the literary, theoretical and historiographical works of the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals. The trends are listed in order of popularity, from the aspects of *zämänawinnät* that the elite most enthusiastically supported and tried to implement, to the aspects of *zämänawinnät* that were perceived as negative or outright dangerous for Ethiopia.

The most popular connotation of *zämänawinnät* had to do with the recently-reconfigured idea of Ethiopian statehood. At the turn of the century, Ethiopia, its borders demarcated and its territorial sovereignty ratified in international treaties, joined the international system of fellow nation-states. ‘Modernity’, in this new political context, meant introducing a series of institutions to deal with what the international system recognised as the basic prerogatives of the state. A first essential step towards this type of modernity was establishing diplomatic relations with other states (and thus embassies and legations). From the economic point of view, *zämänawi* were the founding of a state bank and the rationalisation of currency, with new coins and notes centrally minted in Addis Abäba replacing the various local methods of exchange. *Zämänawi* was also the introduction of a state bureaucracy to deal with new state functions such as the issuing of passports, documents and certificates and the management of newly-founded state schools. A centralised and uniform taxation system was also deemed to be an essential reform. Finally, *zämänawi* was the ratification of civil and penal codes (meant to update the *Fätha Nägäst*¹¹⁶) and of a new state constitution. In this first meaning, therefore, *zämänawinnät* was associated to political and administrative institutions able to efficiently match the requisites and perform the functions that defined a sovereign state in the new (at least for Ethiopia) international system. This explains why pro-*zämänawinnät* elites held a generally negative view of those institutions, like the Orthodox Church or the aristocratic class, which competed with state power.

Secondly, *zämänawinnät* was associated with industrialisation, infrastructures (electric grids, roads, railways), mechanical inventions (cars, photography, telegraph, telephone, gramophone), civil and environmental engineering (construction of bridges, of palaces, of aqueducts, of dams), scientific discoveries (for example in astronomy), medical advancement (including vaccines) and military innovations (firearms, tanks, airplanes). In this connotation, *zämänawinnät* essentially meant modern technologies, and *ləmat* was envisioned as a gradual acquisition of those technologies. The conception that departing students were expected to bring back *ṭəbāb* (‘techniques’) and not *yaf boletika* (‘verbal politics’, ‘talk’, meaning knowledge with no practical use) recurs numerous times in Amharic novels and poems. The view is expressed in

¹¹⁶ ‘The Law of Kings’, a book of law that has been in use in Christian Ethiopia since at least the 16th century. Ethiopia’s 1930 Penal Code, 1957 Penal Code and 1960 Civil Code were all preceded by a preface stating they were meant to ‘revise’ and ‘update’ the *Fätha Nägäst*.

Araya by an old country squire who rejoices that foreign-educated students will come back with all the skills needed to enhance Ethiopia's technological capability (Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 81); Kane comments on this passage by observing that 'in no way is the experience viewed in other than a utilitarian light' (1975: 117). The view of *ləmat* as based on material progress allowed Ethiopian intellectuals to think of a future in which Ethiopia was among the world's most advanced nations due to its infrastructures and scientific know-how, while at the same time retaining its own cultural and religious traditions – thus developing its own brand of modernity. At the same time, this view also grounded the belief that Ethiopia, because of technologies like plough agriculture and writing, was at a more advanced stage of development than other African societies.

Thirdly, *zämänawinnät* meant an expansion of knowledge. In line with the Enlightenment, but also drawing from indigenous Christian symbolism, modern knowledge was often metaphorically associated with the sun or to light, as the title of *Bərhanənnä Sälam* ('Light and Peace') programmatically emphasises¹¹⁷. Of all the ideas that emerged during the Enlightenment in Europe, that of universal education was the one most enthusiastically embraced by Ethiopian thinkers. They campaigned for an expansion of literacy, and envisaged education as a grand solution to all of society's weaknesses. In this third meaning *zämänawinnät* entails a universal right to education, and in particular a universal right to access the rational knowledge of science and positivism. *Zämänawi* knowledge was rational, scientific, and empirically-grounded. Semantically, for example, the term *aəmmo* ('intellect/intelligence' or 'faculty/capability of thinking') gradually came to indicate *one* particular type of intellect, and *one* particular way of thinking, the modern (i.e. rational) one. In its newly-reconceptualised meaning of 'reason' or 'capability of thinking *rationally*', *aəmmo* became a key philosophical term of pre-1936 debates¹¹⁸. Against *zämänawi* knowledge, religious or para-religious folklore as well as popular legends were frequently disparaged as superstition, and many Amharic novels show the author's frustration with deeply seated but scientifically unfounded beliefs. 'The Ethiopian people believe in miracles [*täamr*] rather than the intellect [*hälyo*]', complains *Ato Wäldu* in *Adäfrəs* (Daññaččäw 1969/70: 156), to which a priest retorts:

Of course! What doubt can there be about it? It was the work of the intellect that drove Adam and Eve out of the kingdom of heaven. The Lord said 'believe me with all your heart and all your soul', he did not say 'investigate me' [*tämäramäruñ*] when he gave us the Law. The Ethiopian people know that justice is not obtained through investigation [*bämämäramär*], therefore they believe in miracles (Daññaččäw 1969/70: 156).

¹¹⁷ Daññaččäw and Käbbädä also use the same type of imagery (Molvaer 2008: 202-3). Gäbrä-Həywät's *Ate Məniləkənnä Ityopya* ('Emperor Mənilək and Ethiopia') was printed in 1912 in a Swedish mission journal in Asmara titled *Bərhan Yehun* ('Let there be light').

¹¹⁸ It is in this new connotation that the term was chosen as a title of the first ever Ethiopian newspaper.

Astrologists, diviners, sorcerers and *däbtära* are often portrayed as dishonest impostors who take advantage of ignorant and gullible people, but their influence is destined to decline, the protagonists believe, the more people have access to education. Bahru, the protagonist of Mängəstu Läm̃ma's 1964/65 *Yalačča Gabəčča* ('Marriage of unequals'), has this to say about the village's diviner and the village's astrologer:

At the rate that the people are permeated with modern ideas, as their eyes open on scientific knowledge, I bet you anything you like that Ayya Ləzəbu and Abba Mamito will soon be out of business. They will abandon for good their pernicious profession (Mängəstu 2009: 126).

A particular target of criticism are traditional health treatments, which are harshly condemned as unscientific and ineffective by Həruy Wäldä-Selasse in both *Addis Alām* and *YäLəbb Assab: YäBərhannenna YäŞəyon Mogäsa Gabəčča* ('Thought of the heart: the marriage of Bərhane and Şəyon Mogäsa', 1922/23). Medicine was considered a key facet of *zämänawinnät*, and it is not uncommon that sections of Amharic novels are dedicated to didactically instructing the reader about how to prevent and cure various types of disease.

The clash between scientific truths and popular superstition was generally exemplified with reference to astronomy. Quintessentially *zämänawi* was the knowledge that the earth revolves around the sun, and not the other way round. In historical accounts and fictional works, the emphasis was put on a changed cosmology to exemplify a changed epistemology – a veritable process of symbolic and cognitive remapping. In his 1928 *YäAlām Jiografi BəAmarəñña* ('World geography in Amharic'), Wärkənäh Əşäte makes a point of showing that the heliocentric astronomical model invalidates the Orthodox Church's geocentric worldview (Garretson 2012: 139). Over and over again, the intellectuals manifest all their exasperation at their fellow countrymen who believe in the geocentric model, and refuse to be convinced of the opposite. The Western-educated Ethiopian protagonist of Afäwärk's 1908 *Guide du voyageur en Abyssinie*, for instance, recounts being mocked by his countrymen for defending heliocentrism:

I remember that, having said on one occasion that the earth went round and that the sun was fixed, I had as an answer from the people who had heard me that it was my head which spun and not the earth. [...] And at the same time they said to each other in a tone of commiseration that living in contact with the Europeans had spoiled my intelligence instead of developing it, to the point that I spoke in an extravagant way in claiming that the earth rotates (Afäwärk 1908: 153).

Far from Afäwärk's sarcasm, Gäbrä-Həywät forcefully denounces the climate of intolerance and hostility against the bearers of new ideas:

Was not an intelligent Abyssinian who taught that the earth rotates round the sun recently arrested in Harar?¹¹⁹ After 1900, when the 20th century had begun, was not a man stoned in the Addis Ababa market for abusing the Monophysite faith? Do we not see that our brothers, who go abroad or learn from the whites who come to Abyssinia, though they wish to help their government, are nonetheless regarded as Protestants, Catholics, non-believers or spies of other countries, and are therefore starved and accused? (quoted in Pankhurst 1964a: 309).

Even foreign observers used astronomical knowledge as the more conspicuous evidence of the successful ‘modernisation’ or ‘acculturation’ of indigenous students. The French missionary Henri Rebeaud recounts that his students reported to him as a matter of ridicule that their Amharic teacher had told them that the world was flat and stationary. Rebeaud takes the students’ mockery of the Amharic teacher as indicative of the students’ changing beliefs (Rebeaud 1934: 131-137).

The criticism of scientifically unsubstantiated, ‘irrational’ beliefs translates in an unfavourable disposition towards the clergy. In the novels, priests are represented alongside the nobility as resolutely in the anti-*zämänawinnät* camp, and are often, such as the case in Hərüy’s *Addis Alām*, the main ideological antagonists. The Orthodox cleric *Abba Mogäse* in *Fəḳər Əskä Mäḳabər* (‘Love unto the grave’) is mocked for his ignorance (Haddis 1965/66: 14-15) and criticised for his opportunistic siding alongside *Fitawrari* Mäšäša in the political struggle between the rich *Fitawrari* and his exploited tenants (Haddis 1965/66: 215). The target of the writers’ disapproval, it is important to point out, is the church as an institution and the clergy as a social class, but not religion or God. Most intellectuals continued to believe that religion offered a fundamental moral compass for Ethiopia, and wanted religion to retain a prominent public role. The authors’ anti-clerical position went often hand in hand, for instance, with their advocating a purification of religious rituals and religious morals. Limiting the public influence of the church was not due to any aversion to religion *per se*, or to the presence of religion in the public sphere, but was rather in line with the ideological discrediting of all those institutions that competed with state power. The argument for secularism is therefore to be connected more to the first, rather than the third, meaning of *zämänawinnät*¹²⁰.

The third meaning of *zämänawinnät* expanded the second one. *Zämänawinnät* does not only entail the acquisition of scientific-technological knowledge, but the acquisition of

¹¹⁹ Gäbrä-Həywät alludes here to Gäbrä-Əgziabher Gila-Maryam, who was imprisoned in Harär for stating in public that the earth revolves around the sun.

¹²⁰ Except perhaps in the case of Gäbrä-Həywät, who proposed reforms to guarantee the right to religious freedom in the country, thus envisioning a non-religious public sphere (1912: 353-54). Gäbrä Həywät’s vision was clearly in contrast with the religious nationalism of the Grand Narrative, and remained an isolated proposal.

knowledge in general. The two conceptions often clashed with each other. The understanding of *zämänawinnät* as technical knowledge, mostly emphasised by politicians, was criticised for being too narrow, while the understanding of *zämänawinnät* as knowledge for knowledge's sake, mostly defended by the Ethiopian *literati*, was criticised for being useless for *lāmat*. Mängəstu Läm̄ma fictionalises the clash between the two perspectives in his poem *Agäru Gäbi* ('Home bound', part of his 1956/57 collection *YäGəṭəm Gubae*, 'Synod of poetry'). Advocating the technicistic interpretation of *zämänawinnät* is *Fitawrari* Balča, and his definition of knowledge is clear-cut:

Studying is making cannon from metal
 Studying is making tanks from metal
 Studying is making airplanes
 So he told him, taking his leave,
Fitawrari Balča, the deadly, the marksman
 (those who were not brave fled at that time)
 It's 'just talk' only, studying languages (quoted in Kane 1975: 117-118).

Mängəstu, the poet, playwright and literary critic, could not agree with this conception, but his poem nevertheless shows deference for the charisma of Balča. The champions of practical knowledge were considered to represent a different intellectual type from the champions of theoretical knowledge. The former were portrayed as 'men of action', the latter as 'men of thought'. The *Fitawrari*, in his military prowess, is clearly described by Mängəstu as a man of action, tough and intimidating. Men of thought, who defended knowledge for knowledge's sake, were seen as more cultured but weak and fainthearted. The distinction had a generational connotation. While the first and second generation of intellectuals were admired for being 'men of action', third-generation writers like Mängəstu depicted themselves as 'men of thought'. Mängəstu criticises Balča's conception of knowledge, but admires the sure-footedness and strength of the older generations – a theme he dwells on in many of his plays, as discussed towards the end of this chapter.

Fourthly, *zämänawinnät* was also linked to specific lifestyles and customs, and this acceptance of the term proved particularly controversial. Modern men and modern women were able to speak foreign languages, travelled abroad, dressed in the Western way, and were familiar with Western culture. Martha Näsibu, daughter of *Däjazmač* Näsibu Zamanuel, remembers how her father's house in the early 1930s was furnished in Louis XVI style, with English Chippendale furniture, Sèvres porcelains, Baccarat crystal glasses, Beauvais tapestries, and crystal chandeliers. Näsibu was known in the family and beyond for his refined and exquisite taste (2005: 72). The family had a Fiat car driven by a chauffeur, went to the cinema, and ate European food. The women adorned themselves with French jewelry and perfumes. From his

regular travels to Europe, Näsibu brought home art objects, antiques, carpets, and latest fashion clothes for his family (2005: 68). His *gäbi* comprised a 50,000 square meters park, at the centre of which a wooden Swiss chalet was built for visiting European guests. This new lifestyle¹²¹ developed in the urban environment, and indeed ‘urban culture’ and ‘modern culture’ were often synonyms. *Zämänawinnät* developed in close conjunction to, and became virtually indistinguishable from, *kätämawinnät*, ‘urbanness’¹²².

In relation to customs, *zämänawinnät* was mostly linked to changed marriage practices and changed gender norms. In *Addis Aläm* and *Yäläbb Assab: YäBərhanenna YäŞəyon Mogäsa Gabəčča* Hərüy introduced, as early as the 1930s, profoundly innovative notions regarding women in Ethiopian society. *Zämänawi* was, for him, a rejection of arranged marriages in favour of marriages voluntarily agreed on by both partners. Parents should make sure their daughters have a good education, and should not marry them off before they complete their schooling. Şəyon, aged 13 at the beginning of *Yäläbb Assab*, accepts to marry Bərhanə on condition that he waits until she turns 15 before the marriage takes place. In *Addis Aläm*, Awwākä also marries a woman of his choice, and selects a woman who has had a good education. Mängəstu Lämman’s *Yalačča Gabəčča*, in his promotion of inter-class marriage, is another pivotal work in the definition of *zämänawi* attitudes and behaviours. Bahru, the main character, shocks his aristocratic aunt by eating at the same table with his house servant, and he educates, and eventually marries, his maid. Some pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals campaigned to have these ideas on women’s education concretely implemented: Wərkenah, for example, worked since the 1920s to have a school for girls set up in parallel to the Täfäri Mäkönnən School.

The fourth conception of *zämänawinnät* is the one that came under closest scrutiny, and produced the most intense backlash even among intellectuals that otherwise favoured *zämänawinnät* in its first three acceptations. The *zämänawi* lifestyle was accused to have caused greed, avarice, drunkenness, adultery and other types of immoral behaviour, with women portrayed alternatively as modernity’s greatest sinners or modernity’s greatest victims. The attenuation of traditional gender roles is described to have brought about a crisis of masculinity, and Western-educated young men are portrayed as confused and disoriented, unable to navigate the different cultural and value systems available to them. The new lifestyle was seen as vain, superficial, based on Western imported status-symbols, and built around a materialistic and shallow view of prestige and success. This fourth aspect of *zämänawinnät* was, as a general trend, approached very cautiously, and soon an ideological bifurcation developed. The

¹²¹ Levine (1965: 186-187) also offers a description of the urban lifestyle of the new class of governmental functionaries under Haylä Səlasse.

¹²² The relationship between *zämänawinnät* and *kätämawinnät* has recently received a new scholarly attention, for example Shimelis (2013), and Alazar (2014).

endorsement of modernity as technical progress and rational knowledge was accompanied by a moral condemnation of *zāmānawī* customs and lifestyles.

A traditional conception of modernity

The concept of *zāmānawinnāt*, in the meaning and connotations described above, has a distinctively local genealogy and traces its semantic roots in centuries of Ethiopian political tradition. The exposure of Ethiopian elites to Western ideologies from the late 19th century onwards inspired a re-elaboration and redefinition of indigenous political practices, but *zāmānawinnāt* draws from earlier Ethiopian ideas of innovation much more than from Western philosophy. The Ethiopian conception of ‘modernity’ is not a radically new notion representing a break from previous political thought – it rather gives a new name to already-existing ideological models and relocates them more systematically within the teleological framework of Western modernisation theory.

The main elements of continuity between pre- and post-20th century ideas on innovation and social change are three. Firstly, Europe had always been conceived by Ethiopian rulers as a repository of tools and technical skills to import in order to increase state power. Since medieval times, in Richard Pankhurst’s survey of Ethiopian political practices,

change was acceptable if it promoted one or more of the following aims: the acquisition or maintenance of power, as in the case of the gun, the preservation of health and the conquest of disease, as in the case of modern medicine, or the glorification of the ruler, as in the case of the constructing of palaces and certain churches in their vicinity. Innovation which failed to promote any of these aims tended to be regarded at best with indifference, and at worst with suspicion, often being dismissed indeed as a threat to the Christian way of life (Pankhurst 1964a: 317).

Ethiopian emperors demonstrated a recurring interest in acquiring foreign skills, but such interest was mostly limited to the military sector (import of firearms), the construction sector (building of imperial palaces and churches) and to specific crafts. Successive Ethiopian rulers wrote to European powers asking to send skilled artisans, and particularly blacksmiths, silversmiths, goldsmiths and gilders, but also builders, engineers, weavers and book printers¹²³. Throughout Ethiopia’s history, foreigners were employed as arm traders, military instructors, gun makers, personal doctors or architects. The innovation sought by Ethiopian rulers was purely of a technical kind, and the West was seen as a repository of technologies and skills to

¹²³ Artisanry was despised in highland society and considered a low-class occupation (see Haberland 1979, Quirin 1979 and Dexter 1979). From here came the emperors’ eagerness to import skilled artisans from abroad.

draw from. Here is the letter, for example, that Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508-1540) sent to the Portuguese king Joao III:

I want you to send me men, artificers to make images and printed books, and to make swords and arms of all sorts for fighting; and also masons and carpenters, and men who can make medicines, and physicians, and surgeons to cure illnesses; artificers to beat gold and place it, and goldsmiths and silversmiths, and men who know how to extract gold and silver and also copper from the veins, and men who can make sheet lead and earthen ware; and masters of any trades which are necessary in these kingdoms, also gunsmiths. Assist me in this, which I beg of you as a brother does to a brothers and God will assist you and save you from evil things (quoted in Beckingham and Huntingford 1961: 505).

Subsequent Emperors kept corresponding with European kings asking for workmen able to fabricate and operate firearms. Charles De Maillet, the French Consul in Cairo at the time, reports that Iyasu I (r. 1682-1706) asked for ‘clever workmen to re-establish the arts’, notably a chief engineer, a cannon maker, an armourer, a glass-maker, a gardener, and a good doctor or surgeon, as well as several architects, masons, carpenters and locksmiths (quoted in Pankhurst 1964a: 290). Like his predecessors, Tewodros II was ‘most anxious to attract foreign craftsmen’ (Pankhurst 1964a: 296); his interest for foreign skills was almost exclusively geared towards ‘the reorganisation of the army, the casting of cannon, the construction of carriages upon which to transport these weapons, the building of roads for such wheeled artillery’ and the construction of boats to navigate Lake Ṭana (Pankhurst 1964a: 294). In one of his last letters in 1868, he wrote to British general Robert Napier that ‘you must not leave me without artisans, as I am a lover of the mechanical arts’ (quoted in Rassam 1869: 326). Yohannəs IV and Mənilək II employed foreign traders to act as Ethiopia’s agents in the import of firearms, foreign military experts to train the army, foreign architects and engineers to build mines, bridges, and palaces. Both emperors had a personal European doctor to look after them.

Secondly, the fact that twentieth century intellectuals envisioned a very visible presence of religion in the Ethiopian public sphere is certainly not novel in Ethiopian history. Orthodox Christianity had always been at the forefront of the Abyssinian political life, linked as it was to the notion of divine kingship. Rulers belonging to the Solomonic dynasty were considered keepers and defenders of the Orthodox faith and were also the main patron of the Orthodox Church. The most famous example of ‘emperor-priest’ was Zära Yaḳob (r. 1434-1468), but the concept that the emperor was a religious, as well as political, authority persists well into the nineteenth century, when the revival of monarchical centralism coincided with the emperors’ commitment to publicly and privately uphold Orthodox religious values. The narrative legitimising the Abyssinian monarchy – that of the *Kəbrä Nəgäst* – was essentially of a

religious kind, therefore defending religious orthodoxy also meant defending the emperors' right to rule. Twentieth-century intellectuals kept thinking that the monarchy had the ethical prerogative to regulate public life according to religious values. Their advocating the primacy of religion in society is thus to be linked to their support for the institution of the monarchy. The belief in the divine mandate of the emperor declined as the twentieth century progressed, but the idea that the emperor was not only a political leader, but also a moral guide remained at the centre of the political thought of Ethiopian elites.

Thirdly, the Ethiopian ruling class always fought to preserve Orthodox religious beliefs against foreign religious incursions. While Ethiopian emperors aspired to borrow European technical innovations, they firmly opposed European cultural and religious influences. This was valid for Abyssinian elites as well as the Abyssinian populace at large, at least to a certain extent. The numerous protests and revolts triggered by Emperor Susānyos's ill-fated conversion to Catholicism in 1622 were fuelled by the Orthodox establishment, but they were also the product, it seems, of genuine popular resentment against the imposition of a foreign religion. Hiob Ludolf, for example, reported that the people enthusiastically reacted to Susānyos's hastened restoration of Orthodox Christianity by singing that the 'sheep of Ethiopia' had been freed 'from the bold lions of the West' and rejoicing that 'no more the Western wolves/our Ethiopia shall enthrall' (1684: 357-8). Mistrust towards foreign missionaries remained the norm among the Ethiopian ruling class well into the nineteenth century. In 1839, for example, the Šāwan king Sahlā-Səlasse informed the German Protestant missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf that 'I do not need spiritual teachers so much as doctors, masons and smiths' (Krapf 1860: 26). The belief that Ethiopia's own moral and spiritual resources were as valuable as, if not superior to, Western ethical values was to remain a key component of twentieth-century Ethiopian intellectual thought, and Sahlā-Səlasse's exact words could have well been uttered a century later by almost any of the intellectuals under consideration in this thesis.

Suspicion and sometimes hostility towards foreigners characterise the seventeenth-century reaction against Susānyos's conversion to Catholicism as much as the twentieth-century reaction of the Young Ethiopians against foreign encroachment in Ethiopia's economy and politics. Twentieth-century political ideas were certainly influenced by the intellectuals' exposure to the Western body of knowledge, but they were also, and perhaps to a greater extent, locally rooted. Although twentieth-century political thought presents some distinctively new themes and frameworks, its relationship with the Ethiopian ideological past is of continuity, not of radical rupture.

Pro-*zämänawinnät* and anti-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals

The two categories of pro- and anti-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals are rather loose, and the similarities between the two outweigh the differences. Both sides fully embraced the unicentrism of the Grand Narrative, defended the existing social hierarchy and the importance of the monarchy, envisioned a strong public role for religion, and believed in Ethiopia's destiny of greatness. Starting from these common premises, the two groups diverged, first of all, for their opposite opinions on the first meaning of *zämänawinnät*, the one equating modernity to sovereign centralised statehood. Often coming from provincial dynasties or from the upper echelon of the aristocratic class, anti-*zämänawinnät* groups resented the erosion of their privileges, and strongly opposed the shift from the decentralised structure of the Solomonic kingdom to the centralised modern state single-handedly led by an all-powerful *nəgusä nəgäst*.

A second divergence between pro- and anti-*zämänawinnät* factions hinged on the third meaning of *zämänawinnät*, the one linked to rational and scientific knowledge. The Orthodox Church, which in the twentieth century had been increasingly brought under the control of the monarchy, resented *zämänawinnät* for reasons not dissimilar to those of the nobility. The spreading of modern scientific knowledge via the new Western-style government schools in the country undermined the Church's own hegemony over knowledge-production and monopoly over education. As a consequence, priests and clerics were among the most vocal opponents of *zämänawi* knowledge and schools.

A third divergence had to do with the assumption that *zämänawinnät* would entail increased connectivity, contacts and exchanges with the outside world. Opening the country to the outside world, anti-*zämänawinnät* social forces warned, would threaten Ethiopian cultural and political independence¹²⁴. Socio-political transformations and technological innovations were seen as a danger for the integrity of the state. Infrastructural projects aimed at improving Ethiopia's connections with neighbouring countries (roads, railways, telegraph lines and airplanes), it was argued, would facilitate foreign invasion attempts. This also extended to the realm of culture. Cultural mixing, the anti-*zämänawinnät* bloc believed, would all but destroy *habäša* cultural heritage. Cultural hybridisation was resisted and local cultural and religious orthodoxy was passionately defended. Particularly representative of this deep-seated (and in some cases far-sighted) distrust of foreigners is the opposition of anti-*zämänawinnät* elites to sending Ethiopian students abroad for education. The argument that foreign educated students could take the best of the two worlds was considered naively optimistic. The students, it was feared, would never return back to the homeland. Cultural alterity, in the view of anti-

¹²⁴ Pankhurst uses the term 'misoneism' to refer to what he sees as the 'prevailing attitude of extreme conservatism' and aversion for change in Ethiopian history (1964a: 317).

zämänawinnät thinkers, is not so simple to negotiate; much easier is to get lost in it or swallowed by it.

From these premises, more general conclusions can be drawn on the different philosophical attitudes grounding the pro- and anti-*zämänawinnät* positions. A key element of divergence between the two factions was the way cultural otherness was conceptualised. Anti-*zämänawinnät* thinkers saw alterity, for a large part, as a threat, and as a consequence their relationship with non-*habäša* societies and cultures (be they European or lowland Islamic) was characterised by diffidence and mistrust. While anti-*zämänawinnät* saw alterity as a threat, pro-*zämänawinnät* thought that alterity (and Western alterity in particular) could be instrumentally used for the benefit of the Ethiopian state. Pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals, in other words, had a utilitarian view of Western otherness as useful to achieve some practical political goals. They believed, more specifically, that change offered immense possibilities of expanding the rulers' power internally, and gain international influence abroad. The technologies and discourses of Western modernity were seen to offer great chances to concentrate power into the ruler's hands, and Tāfāri's pro-*zämänawinnät* stance was indeed primarily geared towards increasing his own political authority. Pro-*zämänawinnät* thinkers conceived Western societies as a sort of mine from which to extract whatever objects or ideas were deemed useful to increase wealth and government control. In their admiration for Europe's advanced economies, scientific progress and political efficiency, pro-*zämänawinnät* elites were certainly Europhile. Their Europhilia, though, was a measure of their confidence in Ethiopia's indigenous cultural resources. Ethiopia, with its glorious past of cultural and political achievements, could borrow from Europe on an equal level. From the point of view of its culture and identity, Ethiopia was not seen as under threat.

The pro- and anti-*zämänawinnät* positions are much closer than it seems, as pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals shared the view of otherness as a threat and were rightfully suspicious of the motives of Westerners in the Horn. Both factions, furthermore, positively identified with the Grand Narrative. What differentiated the two groups was their attitude, optimistic or pessimistic, towards the possibility of successfully appropriating aspects of the West without endangering Ethiopia's cultural heritage. Confident in the nationalism of the Grand Narrative, pro-*zämänawinnät* thinkers did not perceive Ethiopia's culture and identity to be in danger, but felt quite acutely the threats of Western military expansionism and economic infiltration. Their Europhilia was part of a defensive modernisation strategy for Ethiopia. Ethiopia's modernisation, the intellectuals thought, would command international respect for its sovereignty as a state, discouraging Western military expansionism and economic penetration. It would also, in the long term, restore Ethiopia's past greatness. Pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals 'faced emotional and more tangible conflicts as they sought modernization for the sake of national independence in a white-dominated and imperialistic world order' (Clarke 2011: xv).

The West was recognised as a danger to reckon with, but the Western model, they reasoned, could be cleverly appropriated to increase Ethiopia's own political power. It was possible, in other words, to counteract the Western threat by beating the Westerners, so to say, at their own game, turning their tools against them. Borrowing from the West, they argued, would guarantee Ethiopia's survival in what was perceived to be the *bellum omnius contra omnes* of 19th and 20th century international relations. Anti-*zāmānawinnāt* intellectuals, on the other side, partly agreed that indigenous resources had to be combined with external resources for Ethiopia to remain a competitive candidate in the international race for power, but they were more doubtful about the outcome of such combination. The outside threat weighted more, in their view, than the benefits that the hybridisation of local and foreign elements would allegedly bring.

Both the vision of 'otherness as threat' and the vision of 'otherness as a model to beat' theorise the relationship between self and other in antagonistic terms. In both cases, alterity is conceptualised as something that Ethiopia is contending against. On the one hand, Ethiopia is contending against the West, struggling to reverse its developmental backwardness. On the other hand, it is contending against other African countries, struggling to reaffirm its own exceptionalism. To win these competitions, diverging strategies are designed: anti-*zāmānawinnāt* elites want to exclusively mobilise indigenous cultural, economic and political resources, while pro-*zāmānawinnāt* elites argue that the integration of foreign tools into the Ethiopian milieu would enhance Ethiopia's chances even more. This competitive vision is based on discreet identities, often defined in essentialist terms as intrinsically antithetical. Such view is typical not only of the way Ethiopian intellectuals related to other countries, but also of the way they conceived their own nation. The external and internal borders were constructed in the same essentialist manner. Throughout the period under consideration in this thesis, literary and historical sources display a clear sense of what 'we' are vis-à-vis what 'they' are. The unicentrism of the Grand Narrative, it will be argued in later chapters, prevented any systematic attempt to understand alterity or decentring Ethiopian thought.

The lag

The idea that Ethiopia was somewhat lagging behind Europe is a recurrent feature of the political thought of pro-*zāmānawinnāt* thinkers. Common to early 20th century intellectuals, according to Bahru, 'was an awareness of their country's backwardness compared with the Western countries they had had the chance to visit' (Bahru 2002: 99). Terms like 'backward' and 'advanced' were commonly used in *Bərhanənnā Sālam* and in Amharic novels when talking about the need for reforms in the country. The relationship between Ethiopia and the West was spoken about in terms of 'catching up', 'bridging the gap' and 'achieving *səltane*'. Generally translated as 'civilisation', *səltane* came to mean, more precisely, 'modern civilisation' or 'development according to a Western pattern'. 'Civilisation' was one, normatively defined with

the West as the single model. In Gərmaččāw Täklä-Hawaryat's novel, for example, Araya opines that 'Ethiopia still has to make considerable effort and she has much exertion and progress to make before reaching the level of culture of the great [nations]' (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 105). *Ləmat* was often conceived as a unilinear succession of 'stages'. In his 1948/49 *Ethiopia and Western civilisation*, Kəbbädä Mikael observes that 'Ethiopia, in her present march towards a greater civilisation, [...] has not yet reached that evolutionary stage which produces the men of genius' (1948/49: 103).

This line of reasoning shows how readily Ethiopian intellectuals adopted modernisation theory, with its Social Darwinist connotations. This appropriation was facilitated by the existence of a number of structural similarities between modernisation theory and the Grand Narrative, which made modernisation theory a useful addition to substantiate some of the Grand Narrative's nodal assumptions. Both modernisation theory and the Grand Narrative, for instance, were based on a teleological view of history. The teleological orientation of modernisation theory, with its ideas of continuous scientific progress and economic growth, matched rather effortlessly with the Grand Narrative's promise of a destiny of victory and glory for Ethiopia. Modernisation theory further offered a developmental foundation to the sense of difference and superiority that was already present among *habäša* people, for example in the way they perceived pastoralist lowlanders. Lastly, the Social Darwinist underpinnings of modernisation theory gave a new resonance to the Grand Narrative's notion of survival. By a law of nature, Ethiopian intellectuals argued, stronger and more advanced nations will take over weaker ones, in a perpetual struggle where only the fittest nations survive. In his 1925 speech at the opening of the Täfäri Mäkönnən School, Wärkənäh Əšäte warns that

no individual nation can survive for long without basic knowledge. It will either lag behind or advance forward. If that nation lags behind, it will be overtaken by a stronger nation (quoted in Garretson 2012: 127).

Kəbbädä Mikael echoed Wärkənäh by explaining that 'a nation assures the safeguard of its liberty by fighting courageously, but as another more civilised nation rises up against it, fearlessness and courage can do nothing against ability and it will succumb' (1948/49: 4-5).

In all the source material analysed for this thesis, no pro-*zämänawinnät* author seems to question the teleology of progress. There is a general agreement about the direction of change, and a general consensus that policy makers and intellectuals have to smoothen, direct and facilitate Ethiopia's transition towards *zämänawinnät*. Opinions diverged not on the *nature*, but rather on the *pace* of change. The two main ideological factions were those urging a rapid change, and those arguing for a slower pace of reforms. Whenever dissatisfaction with the status quo surfaced, it was mostly caused by the belief that Ethiopia was modernising too quickly or

too slowly. The more time went on, the more the promises of the Ethiopian government seemed far from concretising, and the ensuing frustration reached its peak in the 1960s. Even then, though, for the first three generations of intellectuals the disappointment was that the country was taking longer than expected to ‘catch up’ with ‘advanced’ states. The need to catch up *per se* and the type of reforms envisioned by the government to bridge the developmental gap between Ethiopia and Western nations were never really criticised.

Literary authors fictionalised the debate between those advocating gradual change and those advocating swift change, and it is possible to get a sense of what the two positions believed from various passages in *Araya* (Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 77-78, 114-116). The Ethiopian consul in Djibouti is impressed by Araya’s reformist zeal, but advises him to restrain his enthusiasm and proceed carefully. The consul declares to favour the elimination of outdated customs, but warns that a sudden transformation of Ethiopian society would shock the public, offend the elders, and destabilise the minds of ideologically immature people. Araya, on the contrary, brashly opposes the consul’s view with the following words:

In my opinion, one must proceed unhesitantly in a spirit of determination on plans necessary for a people whose country has remained backward and make them take the new road, whether willingly or by force, and throw out at one time all the old customs which have remained (Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 78).

Gərmaččäw here, however, seems to side with the consul, as it is the consul’s gradualist argument that comes across as the most realistic and persuasive. The Ethiopian people, the consul opines, will not be easily led down the new path of modernisation; abruptly introducing radical reforms will provoke a strong backlash and ultimately will not achieve anything. Turkey, he further explains to Araya, succeeded in introducing rapid change because it has access to the sea, has highly developed neighbours, is well connected to both European and Asian countries, and because Turkish people are ‘mature’ enough to understand the benefits of modernisation. While the consul’s caution could emerge as the soundest position in the immediate post-occupation period, moving into the 1960s authors started to agree that Ethiopia was developing too slowly, and their characters (for example, the protagonist of Abbe Gubäñña’s 1962/63 *Alwällädäm*) voiced this dissatisfaction, implicitly criticising *Araya*’s consul and agreeing with Araya. Perhaps more significantly, in 1960s novels characters do not only argue for rapid progress, but actively commit to its practical realisation by participating in protest movements, demonstrations and strikes against the established order.

The position of *Araya*’s consul is quite representative of the tendency to blame Ethiopia’s delayed development on its isolation. When claiming that Turkey could modernise rapidly thanks to its location as a passageway country, the consul implicitly suggests that it was

geographical seclusion that prevented Ethiopia from developing as rapidly. This is by far the most widespread explanation of the causes of Ethiopia's underdevelopment. The lag with the West was never thought to be in kind. Ethiopia's culture (however vaguely defined) is not seen as inferior and is never blamed for Ethiopia's backwardness. On the contrary, Ethiopian intellectuals display a very high degree of confidence in Ethiopia's cultural resources. Ethiopia, in Kābbādā Mikael's terminology, is a 'little nation' compared to the 'big nations' of the West, but the country's backwardness is not due to a built-in Ethiopian inferiority; it is just the accidental result of an unfortunate series of historical and geographical circumstances. Ethiopia's underdevelopment is blamed on foreign encroachment, a typical argumentative strategy of the Grand Narrative. Ethiopia could not progress because it was geographically isolated from the nations that first pioneered modernisation. Kābbādā Mikael's *Ethiopia and Western civilisation*, for example, opens with the following statement:

Ethiopia, isolated from the world, to which the route was barred to her, existed for a long time in the impossibility of making contact with the modern world. It was only when the European states, thanks to the extension of their power and their civilisation, dug the Suez Canal [...] that Ethiopia could begin to contact other peoples of the world (Kābbādā 1948/49: I).

The argument that Ethiopia's backwardness can be traced back to its century-long isolation is a recurrent one in the works of first-, second- and third-generation thinkers. Historians have later contended that Ethiopia's isolation has been overemphasised in historiography, and that Ethiopia did maintain throughout its history constant contact with other societies (Teshale 1995: xix, Samuel Rubenson 2009: 118, Makki 2011, Salvadore 2012)¹²⁵. The problem with the 'isolation argument', besides its historical inaccuracy, is that it explains Ethiopia's 'lag' by focusing only on circumstances described as external and accidental, and ignores internal and structural causes. This, in turn, undermines the possibility of a lucid assessment of Ethiopia's economic wealth and socio-political position. The argument also denies the Ethiopians any collective or individual agency. Those who see Ethiopia's history as characterised by isolation generally qualify the seclusion as externally-imposed by foreign encroachment. As shown in the last paragraph, though, the anti-*zāmānawinnāt* factions of Ethiopia's ruling class opposed an increased connectivity with external countries. Isolation was thus, at least to some extent, self-imposed and used as defensive strategy. It was not foreign encroachment that caused Ethiopia's isolation; instead, it was the perceived threat of foreign encroachment that caused a widespread anxiety, and this anxiety that caused a part of the Ethiopian elite to deliberately pursue isolation.

¹²⁵ For a reflection on this topic from the point of view of world-system theory, see Carlson (2011).

Mimicry or creative incorporation?

Pro-zämänawinnät reform efforts were based on a defensive modernisation programme, and there is perhaps no better author than Gäbrä-Həywät to exemplify this. In his 1912 *Aṭe Məniləkənnä Ityopya* ('Emperor Mənilək and Ethiopia'), Gäbrä-Həywät incisively encourages his reader to 'accept the European mind' in order to quickly bridge the developmental gap between Ethiopia and the West, thus ensuring Ethiopia's sovereignty¹²⁶. The term 'mind' is *aəmro* in the original, therefore the sentence can be read as an endorsement of European 'intellect', 'way of thinking' and 'rationality'. Gäbrä-Həywät clearly sees the European model in a positive light and recognises that Europe is, from the point of view of both material development and knowledge, more advanced than Ethiopia. Ethiopia is lagging behind, and in order to retain its independence needs to learn from Europe as much as possible:

In the old days, ignorance held sway. Today, however, a strong and unassailable enemy called the European mind [*aəmro*] has risen against it [i.e. against ignorance]. Whoever opens his door to the European mind, prospers; whoever closes his door will be destroyed. If our Ethiopia accepts the European mind, no one would dare attack her. If not, she will disintegrate and be enslaved (Gäbrä Həywät 1912: 254).

Statements like this triggered heated scholarly discussions about Gäbrä Həywät's ideological credentials and patriotic standing. For Shiferaw Bekele, Gäbrä Həywät's call to open Ethiopia's door to the European mind 'explicitly recognize[s] the superiority of western civilization' and shows 'that Ethiopian civilization was regarded with the utmost contempt and therefore as something that should be destroyed lock, stock and barrel' (Shiferaw 1994: 115). Gäbrä Həywät, according to Shiferaw, has fully embraced the Western conception of history, and his perspective is solidly Eurocentric. For Messay, too, Gäbrä Həywät's internalisation of Western modernisation theory leads him to discredit all things Ethiopian: 'hindered by the use of Eurocentric norms, not only does Baykedagn find nothing positive in the unfolding of Ethiopian history, but he also sees Ethiopian institutions and values as nothing more than impediments to progress' (Messay 2006: 824-825)¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ In Salvatore's analysis, Gäbre-Heywät 'wanted to jettison the most anachronistic aspects of the Ethiopian social structure to preserve its culture and material independence, making Ethiopia a modern sovereign nation. Messay's fascinating notion of 'survival ethos' was at the very center of Gäbre-Heywät's concerns: one could argue that it was indeed a sentiment of survival to lead Gäbre-Heywät's intellectual production' (Salvatore 2009: 133).

¹²⁷ Messay's assessment of Gäbrä Həywät's work in this 2006 article is much more negative than in Messay's 1999 book, in which he concludes that Gäbrä Həywät 'wanted to get out of the paralysing conflict between tradition and modernity by refurbishing tradition. For him, tradition should neither be compartmentalized nor replaced by Western borrowings: it has to pass through the ordeal of renovation to achieve a renaissance' (1999: 286).

Shiferaw's and Messay's interpretation of Gäbrä Həywät's work is hinged on the notion of Eurocentrism: how much has Gäbrä Həywät given in to Western ideologies, and how much has he remained faithful to Ethiopian values? Those defending Gäbrä Həywät claim that he was far from advocating a mere Westernisation of Ethiopia. Tenkir argues that Gäbrä Həywät's thought is based instead on an 'optimum blend of external and internal' (Tenkir 1995: 44). This distinguishes Gäbrä Həywät both from those intellectuals that 'are so conservative that are unable to transcend the limitations prescribed/proscribed by their own cultural settings' (Tenkir 1995: 44) and from those advocating the wholesale import of 'the theory, politics, economic systems and intellectual traditions of other social formations' (Tenkir 1995: 44). Bahru agrees that Gäbrä Həywät 'was arguing not so much for the adoption of Western ways and modes as for an autochthonous path of development' (2002: 101).

These differing interpretations tend to assume that 'Europe' and 'Ethiopia' belong to two different and self-contained epistemological traditions, one in antagonism with the other. This conception has essentialist overtones, as it '[implies] the existence of perennial boundaries of both a geographical and chronological nature' (Salvadore 2007: 561). Salvadore proposes to conceive the bodies of philosophy produced across Europe and those produced across Africa as porous, fluid and characterised by a long history of interactions. When processes of transculturation and co-constitution are recognised as the norm, rather the exception, in intellectual history, then categories like 'Western civilisation' and 'Ethiopian values' appear much more unstable and open-ended than the scholars cited above imply. Within this framework, as Tenkir and Bahru suggested, Gäbrä Həywät's ideas appear as 'much more than a simple mimicry of European modernity' (Salvadore 2007: 561). They seem to rely, instead, on processes of 'creative incorporation' (Salvadore 2007: 573) that, according to scholars like Cerulli and Sumner, have been typical of Ethiopian intellectual history since the first centuries AD.

Cerulli describes Ethiopian intellectual traditions from the Aksumite period onwards as characterised by a 'very active receptivity' and 'remarkable intensity of reaction' to outside cultures:

Although the Ethiopians in their history have taken inspiration and doctrines from those Greek, Syriac, Christian-Arab, Western sources that were successively available to them, nevertheless this reception has never been passive and literal. On the contrary, it is possible to say that it is typically Ethiopian to embrace and transform, immediately or gradually, the materials of foreign literatures and cultural experiences, to the extent that not even the translations in Ethiopic [i.e. Geez] are always translations in the common sense of the word. Frequently they have additions, supplements, sometimes misunderstandings, and some other times even insertions of new original material that

ends up being greater in size than the passages translated word by word from the source (Cerulli 1968: 12)¹²⁸.

Sumner echoes Cerulli when observing that ‘although the nucleus of what is translated is foreign to Ethiopia, the way it is assimilated and transformed into an indigenous reality is typically Ethiopian’ (Sumner 1986: 29). Translations into Geez from Arabic and ancient Greek ‘offer adaptations which are so free and original that they are practically the equivalent of an authentic Ethiopian work’ (Sumner 1999: 68). The Ethiopian intellectual class has always approached foreign material creatively, adapting it, modifying it, adding and subtracting to it (Sumner 1986: 29). ‘The Ethiopian response to the alien influence’, Sumner concludes, ‘did not represent a slavish adherence to imported forms but rather a creative incorporation’ (Sumner 1999: 67). Teodros Kiros pushes this point even further when he claims that these ‘are not merely appropriations, but rather transformed interpretations’ (Teodros 2005: 2). In his analysis, Ethiopian philosophy

transforms the values and traditions that it willingly embraces, but does so in a novel way. Nothing that comes from outside is accepted on face value. It is fundamentally changed (Teodros 2005: 17).

George Hatke sees this process as typical of Ethiopian ancient history as well, and referring to the cultural exchanges between the two coasts of the Red Sea in the pre-Aksumite period he stresses that ‘South Arabian culture [was] a foreign commodity from which the Ethiopians were able to freely pick and choose when they saw fit, rather than an entire civilization imposed by foreign rulers’ (Hatke 2011: 1).

The first three generations of Ethiopian *pro-zämänawinnät* intellectuals attempted precisely this type of creative incorporation based on self-conscious mediation and hybridisation. They did not advocate a complete adoption of Western values, but rather an integration of aspects of European progress into the Ethiopian milieu, and ‘called for an *appropriate appropriation* of Western modernity on Ethiopian grounds, rejecting anything that goes counter to Ethiopia’s culture and honour’ (Teshale 2008: 357)¹²⁹. They scrutinised what they perceived to be Ethiopian indigenous customs and local traditions, methodically assessing which elements were conducive to modernisation and which were obstacles to remove and overcome. In *Ethiopia and Western civilisation*, Käbbädä Mikael explicitly encourages his readers to adopt this discerning attitude: ‘at this time when we enter the road towards modernisation let us be sure to preserve always these good qualities we possess already and

¹²⁸ A similar observation appears in the Introduction: ‘Ethiopia has assimilated doctrines, cultural elements and artistic techniques that [...] proved to be both triggers of evolution and progress and stimuli for original assimilations into the local tradition’ (Cerulli 1968: 7).

¹²⁹ Emphasis in the original.

destroy the germs of bad ones' (1948/49: 81). Daññaččāw's *Adäfräs* exemplifies this attitude in a section of chapter 37 where characters lengthily discuss what is to be changed and what is to be conserved in Ethiopian culture. European customs and mores were also carefully inspected with the objective of selecting what was desirable and what was not.

Grand Narrative-inspired nationalism gave the first three generations of intellectuals a high degree of cultural confidence, and calls for uncritical acceptance of everything European are practically nowhere to be found in their fictional or non-fictional output. Far from advocating a blanket imitation of the West, characters and authors are worried about reforming society without causing cultural displacement. The authors evidently sympathise with characters that advocate a cautious, circumspect approach. Bāzabəh in Mängəstu Lämman's *Tälfo Bäkise* is of the opinion that 'we should change, but we should not uproot ourselves in the process, for that is no change' (Mängəstu 2009 [1968-69]: 44). Ato Təso in *Adäfräs* convincingly warns that 'if we had wanted to choose everything that is compatible with our times, we would have destroyed (all) trace of our identity' (Daññaččāw 1969/70: 284, quoted in Molvaer 2008: 197). Against *Adäfräs*'s brashness, Təso argues that what he calls the 'Ethiopian personality' has to be preserved as much as possible as long as it is compatible with modern times, and particularly so when it is found to be better than imported Western customs (Molvaer 2008: 196). The model pursued by the intellectuals is that of the amalgam of what were considered the best elements of Western culture and what were considered the best elements of Ethiopian culture. The Grand Narrative was the departing point of this process, and the creative incorporation of the Western model was framed as an 'update' or 'revision' of the Grand Narrative. This hybridisation would create a uniquely Ethiopian way to modernisation – and would ultimately produce, the intellectuals believed, an even more accomplished modernity, superior to the Western one because able to avoid its defects and drawbacks.

Supermarket sociology

While the pro-*zämänawinnät* intelligentsia acknowledged Ethiopia's backwardness in industrial productivity, economic wealth, scientific innovation, civil infrastructure, administrative efficiency and military power, Ethiopian morality was on the contrary considered undoubtedly superior to the Western one. The intellectuals' Europhilia was mostly confined to the scientific and technical domain. In the sphere of ethics, which was believed to be 'of equal importance when it comes to being a civilized country' (Molvaer 2008: 239), no Western value was deemed worthy of being upheld. While in other areas of society pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals argued for the hybridisation of external and internal elements, such hybridisation was unnecessary when it came to moral values. Ethiopia's ethics was already 'civilised' enough and Ethiopia, it was believed, had nothing to learn from the West in this matter. Often the

opposite was argued that it was the West that would benefit from adopting Ethiopian moral principles.

When traditional Ethiopian moral codes were either relaxed or substituted with imported cultural norms, the effect was portrayed to be disastrous. Western materialism, Ethiopian writers show in their works, leads to the dissolution of social relationships, and to unhappiness and disappointment for the individual. Marriage and relationships were one of the main areas of apprehension. The move away from arranged marriages, championed as it was by some of the writers themselves, was shown by other authors to have led to increased prostitution and increased number of divorces. Together with loose sexual customs and adultery, drinking is also described as one of the main social evils of the modern era. In literary works, with alcohol always come fights, scuffles and money squandering. As a consequence of greed and materialism, novels and plays suggest, crime is increasing, from street robberies to political corruption. These evils are often described to have a generational and geographic component, the clash in moral values often being between old people living in rural areas and educated, Westernised youth living in cities. Particularly affecting the youth is the weakening of religious devotion, which the authors saw as a cause of moral decay.

As a consequence, it is frequent that Ethiopian writers promote the first three aspects of *zämänawinnät* while advocating a purification of morals in order to avoid the damaging effects of the fourth. *Addis Alām*'s *Awwākä* is a perfect example of this. While opposing the Church and fighting to replace popular customs and superstitions with scientifically-founded attitudes, *Awwākä* also stresses the importance of moral renewal in the direction of a more puritan and austere lifestyle. He emphasises the religious sacredness of marriage as a life-lasting sacrament, castigates divorce, and argues in favour of the indissoluble type of religious marriage (the *täklil* ceremony, where bride and groom take the Eucharist) over the more widely practiced civil one (*sämanyä*). He also bans the singing of earthly nuptial songs, and replaces them with religious songs in Amharic and Geez celebrating the holiness of marriage. Ethiopian intellectuals never quite approved of the Western democracies' demotion of religion from the public to the private sphere. They were similarly adamant in their disapproval of the atheism professed by some European philosophers from the Enlightenment onwards. Christianity offered, for them, a vital moral anchorage for an ethically-sound societal change, and virtually all characters described by the writers as role models are devout Christians.

The theoretical distinction between material advancement (in which Ethiopia was found to be lacking) and spiritual advancement (in which Ethiopia was found to excel) was a common theme of much Amharic intellectual production. *Gərmaččāw* argues via *Araya* that in terms of moral growth, the West does not have to be taken as an example. *Zämänawinnät*, *Araya* decries, has led to an increase of fornication, promiscuity, malice, cruelty, frivolity and laziness

(Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 119). Ethiopia should reject Western materialist philosophy and preserve her own ethical code (Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 147). Araya duly explains that

Civilisation has two aspects. One is improvement in efficient living, in wealth, in planning, in technology. And the second is to grow strong and mature in spiritual culture, in morality. What is conspicuous in present-day European civilisation is the improvement in living standards and the rapid technological advance, but with respect to the spiritual culture you can hardly say the Europeans excel (Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 147-148).

Käbbädä Mikael similarly argues that ‘as for the Ethiopian people, granted that they have less progressed in material civilisation, they keep abreast of the others and may be ahead of all of them when it comes to moral civilisation’ (1948/49: 97). He elaborates this notion more in detail in another passage:

In order to maintain Ethiopia’s independence, the Ethiopian people must work under the spur of a noble spirit of emulation. Just like other nations, they must acquire more and more knowledge. There is no other way out. They must be careful, however, not to replace the noble qualities acquired by Ethiopia as a millenary and Christian nation [...] with vain and useless habits. Its qualities of wisdom, perseverance, respect towards its fellow-creatures, humanity, its military virtues, and above all its unbreakable faith in God. All these qualities that Ethiopians possess – but difficult for other people to acquire – should not disappear or be destroyed. To preserve these qualities and foster them further is the main task incumbent upon the Ethiopian elite (Käbbädä 1948/49: 80).

Käbbädä’s thought is worth quoting at length here, as he believes that, thanks to these moral qualities, Ethiopia has the possibility to create a *better* modernity than the one achieved by Western states. He sees Westerners as morally corrupt because they have abandoned Christianity, and ‘outside Christianity, there is no supreme law for man’s morality’ (1948/49: 84). He judges that ‘modern men, however enlightened they may be by the sciences [...] are not much superior, morally speaking, to the men of ancient times’ (1948/49: 96-97). In a rather unexpected move, he completely reverses the commonly-held notion of Ethiopia being backward: ‘ourselves, we lament suffering from hunger for civilisation, whereas Europe is at the point of death in an orgy of material civilisation, and its lot is worse than ours’ (1948/49: 84). The close of his argument is equally striking: ‘it is our personal belief that man has not profited by that civilisation and we lean to the conclusion that the world has not yet found the way to the true civilisation’ (1948/49: 97). His hope, the reader can infer, is that Ethiopia will be able to find the way to such ‘true civilisation [*səltane*]’.

Käbbädä's argument that Ethiopia could create a superior modernity by mixing its own 'spiritual civilisation' with Western 'material civilisation' is typical of a methodology that could be termed 'supermarket sociology'. The way Ethiopian intellectuals explored the questions related to *zämänawinnät* and *səlṭane* is based on a segmented way of analysing society where economics is treated as an independent sphere from politics, politics as an independent sphere from ethics, and so on. The attempt to theorise an hybrid modernisation for Ethiopia was based on the belief that it was possible to isolate certain components of a given society, select the best ones, 'buy' them just like products in a supermarket, and later combine them and mix them together ('cook' them) into a new unit. This type of analysis (Messay calls it the 'theory of compartmentalization', 1999: 324) fails to see the interrelation, interdependence and historical co-constitution of different aspects of society. For example, the rise of positivistic ideas about scientific progress during and after the European Enlightenment was closely connected to a move away from religion towards a more secular conception of the state. This historical link is almost never problematised by Ethiopian thinkers. Käbbädä, as seen above, praises Europe scientific and industrial progress, but harshly condemns the anti-religious thought of Enlightenment philosophers; he encourages his Ethiopian readers to import the technology, but to reject the ideology that contributed to the creation of the technology. Nor does he account for the political, economic and social impact in European history of a certain discovery or invention.

Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis argues that the theory of Ethiopia's superior mores and customs was specifically constructed as a reaction against the 'feeling of marginality' experienced by the intellectuals as a result of Western supremacist ideas: 'centering on multidimensional ideological issues which lay culture into two distinctive spheres of the material and spiritual, the intellectuals [...] deliberated on material that revered the science and technology of Western civilization, on Ethiopia's marginality within that domain, and on the monarchy's instigated spiritual realm to overcome this feeling of marginality' (Elizabeth 2010b: 42). The division between the spiritual realm of civilisation, in which Ethiopia outclassed the West, and material realm of civilisation, in which the West outclassed Ethiopia, was reinforced by episodes of racism that the intellectuals suffered abroad. Täsfaye Gässässa's experiences of racist discrimination in the United States led him to believe that 'little minds had built huge buildings' (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 228). Later chapters, however, argue that such 'feeling of marginality' was never rationalised and evaluated, but rather constantly repressed. Messay, for example, points out that the 'theory of compartmentalization' of society in self-contained spheres tries to nullify the harrowing confrontation between scientific norms and religious norms by 'erecting ramparts', and in so doing it 'presents as a solution what is reality the main problem' (1999: 325). As a consequence of these ramparts, the power difference between Europe and Ethiopia was, for a large part, not accounted for in Ethiopian political thought.

Defending the monarchy and the ‘benevolent hierarchy’

The intellectuals called for the introduction of Western ideas in more or less every sphere of life except two. One, as discussed in the last paragraph, was moral codes, and the second one was socio-political hierarchies. The two are closely interlinked. Class hierarchies were thought to be divinely ordained. The Emperor, leading society from the top, had at the same time a secular and religious mandate. Ethiopian writers argued in their works that public morality and private morality are one and the same, and religious obedience and political obedience are two faces of the same coin. Any attack to the God-sanctioned social stratification would also attack the ethical values attached to it, and vice versa. Questioning existing social hierarchies was therefore equated with a religious sin. Western societies were found faulty of not having an ethical guarantor to lead them, and Ethiopian thinkers ‘questioned the adequacy of the West’s ideology for the life of the nation without the moral quest and activism of a divine monarch’ (Elizabeth 2010a: 90-91). Modernity was thus conceived as a ‘part of a transcendent kingly moral insight’ (Elizabeth 2010a: 91). The pro-monarchical position of pro-*zämänawinnät* thinkers, their elitism and their moral traditionalism are all interdependent.

In line with previous Ethiopian political thought, the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals identified the nation with the monarchy, and conceived the monarchy as the primary force for modernisation. They were organically linked to the monarchical tradition, and proposed a reform scheme solidly implanted in Ethiopian time-honoured political structure with the Emperor at the top. Both the intellectuals directly employed by the government and those ‘only peripherally attached to the state apparatus’ (Bahru 1991: 110) advocated for Ethiopia a ‘modernisation from above’ or ‘*lāmat* from above’. Part of this monarchical creed came from the ever-present preoccupation with national unity. Only a supreme centralised authority could command enough influence and power to keep the state together and prevent the emergence of regional particularisms:

A strong, prosperous Ethiopia is thus envisaged as evolving through the inspiration and guidance of a strong national leader. [...] Most authors see a brighter future for the country through orderly development under the direction of a strong leader and progressive central government (Molvaer 2008: 234).

This conception of the monarchy as the source of nationhood and *lāmat* is repeated several times on the pages of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*. The newspaper, for example, celebrated the coronation of Haylā Səlasse with the following words:

This respected grand coronation is told by David himself as a prophecy. God has given hope for Ethiopia that the government would always be there and this is exemplified by Mənilək I to Mənilək II and now we see that Ethiopia is bestowed with the benevolence

of Emperor Haylä Səlasse I. [...] Ethiopia had always been a diamond but nevertheless she was a concealed diamond. This curtain that had always covered her face had alienated her from the rest of the world. This curtain prevented the coming of light into the country¹³⁰. This curtain was first opened by Emperor Mənilək II but nevertheless the curtain was not fully opened and therefore the entry of civilisation was scanty. Because of God's will, Emperor Haylä Səlasse had been bestowed by God to the country and he has opened the curtain fully and hence sunshine and light entered the country. Ethiopia and Europe have come together because of one man (*Bərhanənnā Sālam*, 04/01/1931).

The passage reinstates the notion of the Emperor as God-sent and presents the monarchy as the fulfilment of a divine prophecy – or better, the fulfilment of a destiny to which Ethiopia is bound. The metaphor of the curtain also underlines the supreme agency of the monarch in initiating and directing the process of 'civilisation' and 'enlightenment' in the country. The monarch (and the monarch alone) is invested with the task of modernisation and has the capacity and prerogative to carry it out. In early 20th century Ethiopian political thought, 'progress only meant the movement of science and industry. Progress was not meant to tamper with the grace of the divine nation and its benevolent monarch' (Elizabeth 2010b: 38).

The first three generations of 20th century thinkers rarely strayed from this conception. Gäbrä-Həywät addressed his *Mängəstənnā YəHəzb Astädadär* ('Government and public administration') to Ləjj Iyasu as the one who would have to implement the economic measures proposed in the book – thus supporting the view that the responsibility and authority to make policies and enact reforms rested with the king. In Amharic literature, 'great loyalty to the Emperor is demonstrated by the characters [...]. Even when changes in the land are sought, the imperial power should not be affected' (Molvaer 2008: 29). Many of Həruy's works urge the reader to 'obey your king and your superior' (Bahru 2002: 161). In Həruy's *Addis Alām* an *aläḳa* so defines the terms within which societal change could be deemed acceptable: 'it is no problem if, after their usefulness has been evaluated, matters relating to custom change, *unless this harms the king, the government or the people*' (Həruy 1932/33: 50 quoted in Molvaer 2008: 29)¹³¹. In this passage Həruy (through the *aläḳa*'s words) prescribes the already-discussed evaluative attitude whereby single traits of Ethiopian and European culture have to be rationally scrutinised and judged on the grounds of their usefulness for Ethiopia's progress. The second part of the quote succinctly summarises the three political groupings that the state, according to Həruy, was made of, and establishes a clear hierarchy between them, with the king at the top, the government as secondary and the people as a tertiary component. Devotion to the monarchy is also professed by Afäwärḳ, who in an article for *Bərhanənnā Sālam* describes the Emperor as

¹³⁰ Note how Ethiopia's perceived backwardness is blamed once again on the country's isolation.

¹³¹ Emphasis added.

the representative of God on earth, wittingly adding that the only difference between the two is that God does not need an assistant, while the monarch does (*Bərhanənnā Sālam*, 26/09/1929, see Bahru 2002: 121).

Post-war output is not dissimilar. Gərmaččāw Tāklä-Hawaryat's *Araya* also contains an apology of the monarchical system: the Emperor is anointed by God and he is born to lead the people; he is supreme judge and head; he is a *pater familias* 'who is ever kind and helpful to small and big alike' (quoted in Molvaer 2008: 30). In Daññäččāw Wārku's eponymous novel, Adäfrəs is in favour of the monarchy, and thinks that loving the Emperor makes a good Ethiopian citizen (Zewge 2001). He declares that the Ethiopian people do not appreciate what the Emperor did for them, for example single-handedly granting a constitution and voting rights for parliamentary elections (Daññäččāw 1969/1970: 155). Adäfrəs does not find any fault with the monarch or the institution of the monarchy, and encourages people to support the emperor by recurring once again (as seen above in the example of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*) to the metaphor of light: 'if we want our Emperor to shine, let each one of us contribute as much light as he can to his light: what I am saying is that it is only when our lights are reflected from every direction that his light will radiate better' (1969/1970: 91). Ato Wäldu agrees with Adäfrəs that people expect too much from the Emperor, and blame him for whatever negative circumstance they have to face in their lives – be in hunger, thirst, excessive heat, tiredness, drought (Daññäččāw 1969/1970: 155)¹³².

The pro-monarchical stance was coupled with a generally negative representation of the landowning class. The main ideological adversaries of the novels' pro-*zāmānawinnät* protagonists are generally characters belonging to the landed gentry. The anti-*zāmānawinnät* characters resist change and defend the system of land tenure by claiming it has divine sanction; they are often represented as arrogant and displaying a heightened sense of self-entitlement; they enjoy their hereditary privileges and live a wealthy life of indolence and inconsiderate expenses; they ruthlessly exploit their tenants imposing taxes and tributes. *Fitawrari* Mäšaša in Haddis Alämayähu's *Fəḳər Əskä Mäḳabər*, Wäyzaro Asäggaš in *Adäfrəs* and *Fitawrari* Woldu in Daññäččāw's other novel *The Thirteenth Sun* are all good examples of this trope. The predatory behaviour of the landed gentry is criticised by almost all of the most prominent pre-war intellectuals, whose works demonstrate an 'overriding concern for social justice, and particularly for the alleviation of the conditions of the peasantry' (Bahru 2002: 120).

¹³² This pro-monarchic position, both in the pre- and post-occupation periods, was certainly influenced by censorship, which under Haylä Səlasse would have not allowed the publications of any works questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy; the next chapter, though, will argue that, even when accounting for censorship, Haylä Səlasse and the monarchy had still a large base of consent among the Ethiopian intelligentsia.

‘Oppression and misuse of power are frequently pointed out’ (Molvaer 2008: 28), but the writers also show that when class relations are at their best they are inspired by mutual help and fraternity. Although their role as ideological antagonists is clearly signposted by the authors, the nobility is not represented without sympathy, and sometimes irony. The superstitious beliefs and pompous vanity of Wäyzäro Alganäš are affectionately made fun of throughout Mängəstu Lämman’s *Yalačča Gabəčča*. Characters of even-handed landlords and ‘enlightened’ noblemen are often employed in the novels to show how a ‘good’ aristocrat should behave¹³³. These positive examples pose as fatherly figures for their tenants, they are indulgent and understanding towards them and do not impose taxes and tributes that are too harsh. In *Araya*, a landlord defends the land system by claiming that landlords and tenants are like one big family where all share what they have and each looks after the other’s needs (Gərmaččaw 1948/49: 159-161). In *Fəḵər Əskä Mäḵabər*, an elderly peasant who speaks on behalf of his fellow tenants echoes these words when reminding his landlord that ‘we cannot live without you, and you also cannot live without us’ (Haddis 1965/66: 212).

As shown by these examples, Ethiopian intellectuals ‘stated quite explicitly the injustices of the old order’ (Teshale 2008: 362) but nevertheless they ‘seem on the whole to accept the class structure of their society’ (Molvaer 1980: 28). Intellectuals condemn the cases of abuse within the social system, but not the system itself. The most commonly-envisaged solution to improve the peasants’ lot was replacing tributes with a fixed tax (Bahru 2002: 126), and the suggestion is *per se* significant of a desire to regulate, rather than comprehensively reorganise, the system of land tenure. This elitism is perhaps not surprising, considering that many prominent figures of the pre-war intellectual scene were landowners themselves: Täklä-Hawaryat, who had introduced a fixed tax for peasants while governor of Jəjəga and Čärčär, had over 250 tenants working on his estate in Harärge, and, for all his pro-*zämänawinnät* beliefs, ‘had no qualms about selling grain from his large stock to the neighbouring peasants in times of famine’ (Bahru 2002: 127). And even when the intellectuals championed the cause of the peasants, they never went as far as defending the underprivileged masses forced to serve Amhara settlers and *näḟäñña* in the newly-conquered southern and western provinces.

A general conception of ‘everyone stay at his/her place!’ informs many of the moral principles promoted by the authors, such as obedience to authorities – parents, Emperor and God. In novels and plays, when bad behaviour is shown (and is generally punished), it consists of forms of disrespect towards these three authority figures. The weakening and contestation of social hierarchies is believed to be one of the major causes of conflict and disunity, as *Ato Təso* explains in *Adäfrəs*:

¹³³ For example, the family of Šähay Mäsfən in Mäkönnən Əndalkačaw’s eponymous novel (1956/57), *Fitawrari Bälay* in Əmru Haylä-Səlasse’s eponymous short story (1963/64), *Fitawrari Təkka* in Bäalu Gərma’s *YäHəllina Dəwāl* (1974), and *Fitawrari Abesha* in Abbe Gubäñña’s *Defiance* (1975).

We have this tradition of authority and superiority that causes respect to be paid to us and that protects our right. What does it mean, then, to say we have the tradition of honouring authority and obeying superiors? It means, for example, that unity in the family remains strong by the father's authority and superiority. It means that if the father's authority is destroyed, if the father's superiority meets with a competitor or rival, the house that was united will scatter in all directions. Furthermore, the clergy has spiritual authority, and the state has governmental authority and superiority which serve to guarantee a peaceful life (Daňňáččaw 1969/1970: 72-73).

The desire to retouch, and not transform, the existing social structure shows a certain degree of class anxiety on the part of the writers. Many of them rose from humble backgrounds to government positions through sheer loyalty, and they therefore valued obedience as an important social value. They had all interests in defending meritocracy – the belief that social advancement would only be granted to those, like them, versed in modern education and devout to the Emperor. They felt keenly the competition of the new rich and of the old aristocracy, who could count on an amount of economic and social capital many writers did not possess. Pro-*zāmānawinnāt* thinkers thought modernisation could only be carried out by their own class of Western-educated civil servants loyal to the Emperor. Their anti-aristocrat and pro-monarchical stance, therefore, went hand in hand; the vertical fidelity to the Emperor supported by the belief that he was the only figure with the power to silence the aristocrats and with the political will to ferry the country towards *səlṭane*. Vice versa, the pro-*zāmānawinnāt* intellectuals coming from the nobility, such as Mäkönnən Əndalkaçāw, felt the competition of the Western-educated commoners that the Emperor nurtured and favoured, and this offered an incentive to punish in their creative works the characters that do not respect traditional authority figures.

The desire to defend one's elite status in the country's power hierarchies was a central concern for both aristocrats and newly-promoted commoners. Greed, for example, is harshly condemned by both groups of writers out of a desire to preserve the class structure of society. The pursuit of luxury is reviled by Mäkönnən Əndalkaçāw in his *YäDəhočč Kätäma* ('City of the poor', 1954/55), the story of a rich businessman whose only purpose in life is to accumulate more wealth, to the point that he neglects his friends, becomes insane and dies alone. In novels and plays, tragedy befalls those characters that accumulate economic and political power outside of existing mechanisms of social ascent. An enriched merchant could claim the same privileges of the upper classes, but his ambition would unsettle traditional power hierarchies, and is punished by the authors as a sin of avarice. He will not be able to manage his newly-acquired power in a sound and ethical way without the knowledge derived from Western-style education (in the works of the recently-elevated educated elite), or without the moral authority that old noble families possess (in the works of writers coming from aristocratic backgrounds).

The harsh condemnation for those who subvert traditional hierarchies also has a gender dimension. The theme of marriage and relationships is perhaps the single most common topic Ethiopian authors wrote about, and these texts mostly discuss the changed role of women in society. Education for women is spreading; marriage by choice is being promoted over arranged marriages; women may choose to marry only after they complete their education; Western fashion and manners are becoming more common in the cities; relationships outside of marriage are increasing – this the scenario described in literary works¹³⁴. Ethiopian writers look at these transformations with uneasiness, and their works mirror the

basic insecurity about the whole idea of marriage in the transitional atmosphere of [1950s and 1960s] Ethiopia. [...] The foreign educated-man feels he should have an educated wife, but he also feels threatened by a woman who is independent, especially if she is holding a job (Levine 1965: 203).

Many intellectuals, Həruy above all, actively championed the cause of women's right to get an education and have a say in the choice of marriage partners. At the same time, though, the new role of women was also seen as a threat to male-dominated Ethiopian society. The contradiction between the theoretical will to promote the acculturation of women and the fear that women's emancipation could have detrimental effects on public morality remains painfully unsolved in Ethiopian literature. One of the young protagonists of Mängəstu Lämman's *Tälfo Bäkise* ('Marriage by abduction') quickly changes his mind about women's rights after being badly beaten by a girl he was abducting for marriage:

You can't imagine the strength of her arm. When I think of things now – I know how wrong I was! The whole grand mistake was committed by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts! That they should allow such a study as physical education and things like that for our young sweet girls is the blunder of the century. It was madam Asqualetch, a great lady who said 'Gymnastics is unfit for a proper lady', and she refused to send her daughter to school for this very reason. What a fool I was to criticize her position! (Mängəstu 2009 [1968/69]: 34).

The authors give various solutions as to how a 'good' and 'modern' woman should behave, but there is very little agreement on how the two attributes can go together, or whether they can go together at all¹³⁵. The very high number of novels tackling the theme of prostitution¹³⁶ shows the

¹³⁴ Despite the writers' emphasis on the topic, the changes they described concerned only a very restricted minority of Ethiopian women, even in educated urban environments.

¹³⁵ The fear that women would lose their social role in the face of expanding modernisation was voiced, among others, by Tewodros himself, who refused to introduce mechanical mills in Ethiopia on the grounds that it would leave women (traditionally in charge of grinding) with nothing to do (Lejean 1872: 109). Yohannəs, instead, favoured the introduction of mechanical mills precisely to replace 'the army of women which encumbers us now and ruins the country' (quoted in Pankhurst 1964a: 298).

extent to which Ethiopian authors worried that the relationships between men and women had deteriorated. Women who break the moral laws of modesty, virginity and obedience are not always represented as dissolute sinners. More often, they are depicted in a pietistic way as the innocent (if naïve) victims of male moral recklessness. In any case, women who disobey authority figures (and besides parents, king and God, a fourth central authority figure is for them the husband) are generally condemned by the writers to a life of misery.

The multi-faceted relation with the imperial power gave the writings from the early 20th century a characteristic ambivalence: they ‘propagated hierarchy as [they] sought democracy, elitism as [they] aspired for egalitarianism and mysticism as [they] promoted skepticism’ (Elizabeth 2010: 90). The notion of the separation of powers, democracy and universal suffrage were never incorporated in Ethiopian political philosophy, and were openly rejected by Ethiopian politicians. ‘Here it would not work’ Mənilək II was reported to answer, rather plainly, to the French envoy’s description of the French parliamentary system (quoted in Pankhurst 1964a: 305). The two European models that Ethiopian political thought more closely resonated with are enlightened absolutism and ‘one nation’ conservatism. There were, of course, profound differences from the way enlightened absolutism¹³⁷ was conceived and practiced in Europe. In Ethiopia, the power of the monarch was not said to derive from a social contract, but from a divine mandate¹³⁸. But there were also similarities: not unlike European monarchs, Haylä Səlasse used the intellectuals’ backing to consolidate his power, centralise state functions and further legitimise his rule. Elements that, albeit in a very different political and ideological environment, are reminiscent of ‘one nation’ conservatism are, for example, the belief that everyone could profit from the existence of a ‘benevolent hierarchy’, within which the upper classes had a paternalistic obligation to be charitable towards those below them.

The Japanisers

Embracing modernisation theory meant, for Ethiopian thinkers, to conceive of their country as trailing behind Western nations in the single, universally valid, development path regulating the lives of all human societies. The need for Ethiopia to catch up with the West led to the search for an appropriate model – a country that, starting off like Ethiopia as a ‘little nation’, managed to gain a place among the world’s ‘big nations’. This model was identified as Japan, and enthusiasm for the Japanese example was so widespread before the Italian

¹³⁶ The two most famous ones are Asäffa Gäbrä-Maryam’s *Əndəwaṭṭaččə kərraččə*, 1953/54) and Nəgaš Gäbrä-Maryam’s *Setäñña Adari* (‘Prostitute’, 1963/64).

¹³⁷ The concept of ‘enlightened absolutism’ very well applies to the Ethiopian case, where authors constantly use metaphors related to light to describe the Emperor as source and instrument of modernisation. The metaphor of light comes from Christian symbolism (e.g. the 15th century *Məṣḥafä Bərhan*, ‘The book of light’ composed by Emperor Zära Yaḳob) as much as being influenced by the European Enlightenment.

¹³⁸ The principle, as we have seen, was inscribed in the Ethiopian constitution.

occupation that historians refer to pre-war intellectuals, both first- and second-generation ones, as Ethiopia's 'Japanisers'¹³⁹. The term needs to be qualified, as pre-war intellectuals admired Japan in so far as it offered a blueprint to reach the levels of economic growth and technological-scientific progress of Europe and the United States. In this sense, pre-war thinkers were 'Westernisers' as much as they were 'Japanisers', and their admiration for Japan was an extension of their admiration for what they saw as Western modernity. Japan and Europe were abstract models or patterns, and of course in neither case did Ethiopian intellectuals want their country to become a copy of Japan or Europe. While the ultimate objective pursued by pre-war Ethiopian intelligentsia was for Ethiopia to be recognised among the world's power-brokers, this ascent would have to be based on the safeguard of the country's own traditions. Japan was conceived, in this sense, as a temporary, transitional guidance towards building a uniquely Ethiopian form of modernity.

The general Europhilia of early 20th century Ethiopian authors was attenuated by a series of pragmatic and ideological considerations that made Japan a valuable counter-model. First of all, the most significant threats to Ethiopian political and economic sovereignty were coming from European powers, so that 'modernity's best teachers were also those who most threatened Ethiopia's independence' (Clarke 2011: xv). Racism, as seen in the previous paragraph, played a role in nurturing Ethiopian resentment towards the Western model: 'how could Ethiopians with safety and dignity borrow from the West that held them in racial and cultural contempt?' (Clarke 2011: xv). It is more difficult to exactly assess the extent to which Western racism influenced pre-war political thought. Racially prejudiced descriptions of Ethiopians primitiveness coexisted with a Western fascination for Ethiopia as the legendary land of 'black Caucasians'; Western depictions of Ethiopia oscillated between these two poles for the whole period from Adwa to the 1930s (Marcus 2005). There appeared to have been a widespread outrage in Ethiopia at the discriminatory attitudes of white foreigners (Clarke 2012: 17), but European racism is seldom discussed or comprehensively analysed in the intellectual production of the era, and it does not seem to be a dominant concern in the Ethiopian intellectual agenda. The Young Ethiopians, as we have seen, reacted strongly against what they saw as the discriminatory attitudes of Westerners in Ethiopia, but their indignation was not translated in a theoretical repudiation of Western ideology or in an explicitly anti-colonial or anti-racist political programme. While European Social Darwinists perceived the world in terms of the struggle between 'races of high social efficiency' and 'races of lower social efficiency', Ethiopian thinkers did not elaborate much on the racial and biological aspects of this concept, and adopted Social Darwinism in its sociological version as the struggle between 'nations', not 'races'. Although racial issues were not central in Ethiopian political thought, the brief and ill-

¹³⁹ The first historian to use the term was Addis Hiwet in his *Ethiopia: from autocracy to revolution* (1975).

fated alliance between Ethiopia and Japan in the pre-1935 years was certainly framed, partly at least, from the racial point of view as a solidarity agreement between non-white peoples. Clarke suggests that it was the Japanese that emphasised the racial connotation of the alliance and ‘began seductively speaking of leading an alliance of the world’s colored peoples against white imperialism’ (Clarke 2011: 13).

Japan had an added bonus too, as it did not only offer an example of a ‘little nation’ successfully becoming ‘big’, but also of a transition to modernity able to retain local customs and culture. In the view of pre-war intellectuals ‘Japan appropriated Western modernity without losing its Japanese soul’ (Teshale 2008: 357). The most appealing aspect of the Japanese model was, for Ethiopian intellectuals, its successful hybridising of external and internal inputs. This held particularly true at the level of the political macrostructure, Japan having successfully reinvented the monarchy as one of its main modernising drives – exactly what Ethiopian intellectuals hoped to achieve in their own country.

All of major first-generation intellectuals praised Japan at one moment or another. In one of the first Amharic-language newspapers ever produced in Ethiopia¹⁴⁰, Tigrayan author Gäbrä-Əgziabher Gila-Maryam published a poem praising *zämänawinnät* in the following terms: ‘He who accepts it, fears no one / He will become like Japan, strong in everything’ (quoted in Pankhurst 1962: 262). Gäbrä-Həywät Baykädañ concluded his *Ate Məniləkənnä Ityopya* (‘Emperor Mənilək and Ethiopia’) with the advice to *Ləjj* Iyasu to follow the example of the Japanese government. In another point, Gäbrä-Həywät comments that

when the Japanese Government finds someone willing to go to Europe to learn, it supports them by giving them money. [...] As a result the people [of Japan] opened their eyes. They became rich, strong and respectable. [...] China and Asia have been following the path of Japan with great enthusiasm (quoted in Pankhurst 1964a: 309).

Haylä Səlasse reportedly had a personal fascination with Japan (Clarke 2011: 12), and *Bərhanənnä Səlam* regularly published articles advocating the adoption of the Japanese model. In the teleology of progress, Ethiopia was considered to be as developed as Japan was before the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Ethiopia’s lag over Japan was therefore quantified at 60 years: ‘sixty years ago’, remarked *Fitawrari* Däressa Amänte on a 1927 issue of *Bərhanənnä Səlam*, ‘Japan was in the same state as Ethiopia’ (quoted in Bahru 2008: 205). The urge to mathematically measure Ethiopia’s delay shows the extent to which the problem of Ethiopia’s backwardness was faced with a positivistic mindset. Wərķənäh Əšäte reasserted all the main elements of

¹⁴⁰ It is dubious whether Gäbrä-Əgziabher’s publication can really qualify as a newspaper. It consisted of a handwritten sheet produced in 50 copies every week (Pankhurst 1962: 260).

Japanisation in his already-quoted speech at the opening of the Täfäri Mäkönnən School in 1925:

Realizing that to be successful in life they ought to imbibe European knowledge and imbibe it fast, [the Japanese] began to work diligently and were able to reach in sixty years the level of development that it has taken others centuries. Let us follow this amazing and praiseworthy example of far-sightedness and resoluteness (quoted in Bahru 2008: 204).

And he continues:

The reason behind the success of the Japanese to successfully defend their independence is their mastery of knowledge and education in due time (quoted in Garretson 2012: 127).

The peak of Ethiopia's Nippophilia was the period between Haylä Səlassə's coronation and the Italian invasion. In those years, the two intellectuals that moved the most concrete steps towards actualising this desired 'Japanisation' were Hərüy Wäldä-Selasse and Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam. Hərüy, as Haylä Səlassə's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was the leader of an Ethiopian diplomatic mission that visited Japan in 1931, following a treaty of friendship and commerce signed by the two countries in 1927 and the presence of a Japanese delegation at Haylä Səlassə's coronation in 1930. Hərüy's trip from the 5th of November to the 28th of December 1931 undoubtedly marks the highest point of Ethio-Japanese relations. The main objective of the visit was to develop closer commercial ties and stimulate Japanese investments in Ethiopia. Hərüy was hopeful to arrange for Ethiopia to import cheap everyday goods from Japan (Clarke 2011: 45). The Ethiopian delegation received a very warm welcome. In the forty days they spent in Japan, Hərüy and his party attended a number of high-profile receptions and visited factories, offices, industrial farms, zoos, theatres, railways, shrines, museums, and military training schools. As part of his visit, he met Emperor Hirohito, to whom he reportedly announced:

Our Ethiopian Emperor is deeply impressed with Japanese Empire's remarkable and great progress of the last sixty years, and is moved with surprise that the Japanese Empire accomplished such a great deed in such a short time. [...] He is determined to advocate to his whole nation to take the Great Japanese Empire as the best model (quoted in Bahru 2008: 205).

His Japanese sojourn impressed Hərüy so much that, back in Ethiopia, he quickly put together a booklet titled *Mahdärä Bərhan Həgär Japan* ('The place of light: the country of Japan'), published in 1932, praising the Japanese example. Hərüy writes that it is surprising that two countries with such similar histories had remained for such a long time oblivious of each other.

He proceeds to list the similarities between the Ethiopia and Japan. Both had been ruled by long and ‘uninterrupted’ imperial dynasties. Hirohito was the 124th monarch of the Jimmu dynasty, while Haylä Səlasse was the 126th of the Solomonic line. Both empires had for centuries itinerant capitals. The Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868), as a period of decentralised political authority, is comparable to the Ethiopian *Zämänä Mäsafənt* (1769-1855). In his reassertion of centralised imperial power, Meiji was similar to Mənilək II. *Məhdärä Bərhan Həgār Japan* was promptly translated in Japanese by Oreste and Enko Vaccari, and the Japanese translation was published in Tokyo in 1934, with a preface penned by the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Kijūrō Shidehara (Clarke 2011: 45).

Täklä-Hawaryat’s contribution to Ethiopia’s pro-Japanese momentum is mostly linked to the 1931 constitution, which Täklä-Hawaryat was asked by Haylä Səlasse to draft. Täklä-Hawaryat declares in his autobiography to have consulted copies of the German, Italian, Japanese and English [*sic*] constitutions (Bahru 2008: 208), but in the resulting text the Japanese influence proved by far the greatest. Täklä-Hawaryat’s draft was subsequently reviewed by Hərüy, Ras Kassa and Haylä Səlasse himself (Bahru 2008: 208). Educated for many years in Russia and reputed to be a Russophile, it is dubious to what extent Täklä-Hawaryat really shared Hərüy’s profound admiration for Japan. Täklä-Hawaryat reportedly believed that Ethiopia had more poignant political models in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean area, with which it had always maintained close links due to, among other things, the common Orthodox Christian faith (Clarke 2011: 57). On top of this, Täklä-Hawaryat seemed to have been worried that increased commercial ties with Japan would antagonise European countries (Clarke 2011: 56) – and, as we shall see, his fears would prove far-sighted. The circumstances surrounding the drafting of the 1931 constitution are not well documented, but, although Täklä-Hawaryat certainly produced a first comprehensive draft, it has been suggested that it was Hərüy who played a decisive role in revising it along the lines of the Meiji model (Clarke 2011: 57).

In whatever way the drafting process went, the result was that many of the articles of the 1931 constitution are closely modelled on the articles of the Meiji constitution, and a clause-by-clause analysis of the two texts reveals striking similarities¹⁴¹. Bahru notices that both constitutions were granted from above, ‘not won by popular struggle from below’, and were intended ‘more as vehicles of strong monarchical government than as platforms for genuine popular representation’ (Bahru 2008: 206-207). The Ethiopian constitution was, if anything, more authoritarian, and ‘the chapters on the rights and duties of citizens are masterpieces in qualification: [...] the guaranteeing of civil liberties is coupled with such nullifiers as ‘within

¹⁴¹ For a study on Ethiopia’s constitutional development, including the influence of the Meiji model on the 1931 constitution, see Paul and Clapham (1967).

the limits provided for by the law’ or ‘except in cases provided for in the law’’ (Bahru 2008: 206). Clarke so comments in this regard:

Ethiopia’s Constitution concentrated and made more emphatic the Emperor’s traditional, absolute and Imperial power than did Japan’s. Ethiopia’s Emperor held executive power over the central and provincial governments, and the newly created parliament, which had only powers of discussion, provided no check on him (Clarke 2011: 38).

The case of the 1931 constitution shows that the most appealing trait of the Japanese paradigm was the possibilities it offered to reinvent the political significance of the monarchy by presenting it as the main driving agent of modernisation. In other words, Japan offered the example of a successful top-down, monarchy-driven progress, and it was precisely this model that Ethiopian intellectuals envisioned to replicate in their own country.

The commercial ties and political alliance between Japan and Ethiopia would not survive pre-Second World War international tensions. Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, and although in Japan popular support for Ethiopia was strong, the Japanese government could not risk alienating a powerful potential ally like Italy. After the liberation of Ethiopia in 1941, the old generation of Japanisers had either died (Həruy) or lost influence in the government (Wärkenäh and Täklä-Hawaryat), and the new generation of younger intellectuals looked rather towards the UK and USA than towards Japan.

Käbbädä Mikael was one of the few in the post-occupation period to still demonstrate faith in the viability of the Japanese model; his *Japan Əndəmən Säləttänäčč* (‘How Japan modernised’ but also translatable as ‘How Japan became civilised’, considering that the verb comes from the same root as *səlṭane*), published in 1953/54, was the last major contribution to the Japanising cause. From one point of view, Käbbädä reiterates and even expands the elements of similarity between Ethiopia and Japan. To Həruy’s list, he adds that both Ethiopia and Japan were visited by the Portuguese roughly at the same time, and reacted to the Portuguese evangelisation attempts by forcing them out of the country in order to safeguard local religion traditions. After the Portuguese incursion, Käbbädä reasons, both countries remained isolated from the external world for two centuries and a half. However, Käbbädä also accounts for the differences between Ethiopia and Japan, noticing that Japan was more developed than Ethiopia at the time of renewed contact with Westerners in the mid-19th century. Käbbädä writes at the time when one of the main objectives of pro-zāmānawinnāt Ethiopians, to develop their country’s military and economic sector enough to effectively repel foreign attacks, had already failed. The five years of Italian occupation had already invalidated the main rationale behind the adoption of the Japanese model, i.e. to preserve Ethiopia’s independence.

After Kābbādā, the Japanese model did not disappear, but started being discussed in different terms. In the pre-war period the Ethiopian intellectuals spurred their ruling class to ‘do just like Japan’. From the 1950s onwards, the discourse on Japan shifted towards an *ex post* assessment of ‘why Japan managed to modernise and we did not’¹⁴².

A flawed hybridisation

The previous paragraphs have discussed the elements of Ethiopian political thought shared by all the exponents of the first, second, and third generation of Ethiopian intellectuals. Although it is possible to identify general trends, Ethiopian political thought was obviously not homogeneous, particularly from one generation to the next. An important distinction can be drawn between the first and second generation on the one hand and the third generation on the other. The first two generations openly admired aspects of Western culture and their declared Europhilia was rather trouble-free. The third generation, by contrast, saw the West in a much more disillusioned light, and started problematising what they saw as the negative consequences of *zāmānawinnāt*. Similarly, while first- and second-generation intellectuals are confident about the possibility of hybridising the best elements of Ethiopian tradition with the best elements of Western civilisation, the third generation sees this uniquely Ethiopian brand of modernity as patchwork of incongruous and mismatched elements. The hybrid turned out to be a monstrous oddity.

Third-generation works often point out that the desired hybridisation is harder to achieve in practice than it is to advocate in words. Supermarket sociology was based on the optimistic belief that the way forward for Ethiopia is that of a rationally-pondered intercultural assemblage, a scientific combination of discerningly-handpicked social elements. The reality of the process of cultural hybridisation, though, proves often more divisive and emotionally overwhelming than forecasted by the theory. Third-generation writers dedicated ample space in their works to talk about the self-doubts, cultural disorientation and insecurity of educated Ethiopians. Sometimes, for instance in Māngəstu Lāmma *Tälfo Bākise*, their confusion, contradictions and cognitive dissonance are gently satirised. Other times, like in Daññaččāw Wārku’s *Adäfrəs* and *The Thirteenth Sun*, the authors more cynically depict a climate of cultural schizophrenia, in which the individual is painfully torn between different value systems he/she is unable to reconcile. Other times again, for example in Šāgayə Gäbrä-Mādhīn poem ‘Also of Etiopics’, the authors spitefully criticise the shallowness and emptiness produced by the crumbling of values and meanings.

¹⁴² Despite this bitterness, the fascination with Japan as a possible developmental model, or as a useful comparison pole for Ethiopia, lasts to the present day. A whole stream of publications exists comparing Japan and Ethiopia’s historical trajectories (Messay 1997, Levine 1997 and 2007, Merid W. Aregay 1997, Getachew Felleke 2006, Seifudein 2006, Levine 2007).

Third-generation characters, with their hesitations and inconsistencies, could not be more distant from, to draw a striking comparison, the forceful and sure-footed Awwākā in Hərüy's 1931/32 *Addis Alām*. Awwākā knows what he wants and has a clear picture of which Western customs are worth adopting and introducing in his home country. Throughout the novel, he is unwavering in his convictions, and does not give up when he initially encounters a strong opposition. His efforts pay off, and in the end he succeeds in changing his community the way he intended:

Aflame with the zeal of the reformer, Awwākā is free from self-doubt and in the end his relatives and opponents are pictured as capitulating before him, as befits one who possesses the Truth, even as had the saints of old who won like victories over the pagan kings (Kane 1975: 139).

Addis Alām, from this point of view, could be interpreted as the story of Awwākā's success to theorise and implement an effective model of *zāmānawinnāt*.

In second-generation works, Hərüy's optimism becomes more attenuated, and characters start to emerge that find it hard to navigate different value systems. A weird mutt is, for example, Taddäsā in *Araya*. His physical appearance immediately reveals his double cultural affiliation: he is dressed half-European half-Ethiopian, with hair cut on the back and the sides of the head but long at the top, and he is unable to speak Amharic without intermixing French or Arabic words. He is also an alcoholic, which in Amharic literature seems to be the fate of many of the characters who are unable to successfully find their way in the overabundance of new cultural options. Araya, needless to say, is not positively impressed and promptly abandons Taddäsā to his own fate (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 93). Taddäsā's disorientation is quickly dismissed as an eccentric, and rather miserable, exception. Araya, by contrast, is most certainly depicted as a hero. He is sure of his ideas, fights in the patriotic resistance during the Italian occupation, and when, after the liberation, he falls out with the corrupt bureaucracy, he maintains his moral integrity by retiring to the countryside and initiating a successful agricultural enterprise.

Mängəstu Lämma two comedies *Yalačča Gabəčča* ('Marriage of Unequals', 1964/65) and *Ṭälfo Bäkise* ('Marriage by Abduction', 1968/69) are exemplary of the change of perspective between second and third generation. Just like Gərmaččāw, Mängəstu initially trusted the ability of Ethiopia's young educated elites to become agents of positive change. This optimism is apparent in his first comedy, *Yalačča Gabəčča*, which, for tone and content, is close to first- and second-generation works. Here the main protagonist, Bahru, has more than one thing in common with Hərüy's Awwākā. He has studied abroad and has come back to Ethiopia with a very well-defined idea of how to contribute to his country's progress. He heads out to the

countryside, where he builds a school and starts teaching local children and adults. Although coming from an aristocratic family, he believes that ‘man is man’ and ‘the common man and the nobleman are the same’ and marries his maid, Bäläte, a girl of humble origin, but intelligent, beautiful and warm-hearted. By his own admission, he has found his purpose in life:

Never before I have found living in this world more gratifying than at this particular juncture of my life. I am at last back in my own country. Up until now, although I did find myself on Ethiopian soil, spiritually I was still in Europe. I regained my true identity only after coming out into the country, to this village. Now the spirits of the hill and mountains embrace me; the soil hugs me close; the stones speak to me; the trees whisper in my ears; the water is sweet to me; the air nourishes me (2009: 126).

The idyll ends with the arrival in town of Bahru’s aunt, the rich landlady *Wäyzäro* Alganäš. Unaware of his marriage to Bäläte, *Wäyzäro* Alganäš’s plan for Bahru is, in her own words, to ‘have him settle near me in Addis Ababa in a cosy government job, and then to get him married to one who is his social peer’ (2009: 117). When she announces to Bahru that she has found a girl of good family for him to marry and that she expects him to move back to Addis Ababa after the marriage, Bahru objects as thus:

How then is this country to move forward, to progress, if those who are educated are not prepared to come out to the village to teach? The country can hardly move an inch. It stays put (2009: 129).

He is also a ‘man of action’, according to Mängəstu’s stage directions (2009: 153), and when an astrologer sent by *Wäyzäro* Alganäš tricks Bäläte into running away from home, Bahru reacts decisively:

This is the real challenge; and I love it! [...] Modernization with no guts to it is no civilization. Arise! Let us go! I shall bring her home! (2009: 153).

Like Awwākā, Bahru eventually succeeds. The lies of the astrologer are exposed, *Wäyzäro* Alganäš gives up her marriage plans, and Bahru and Bäläte are happy back together. Like Awwākā and Araya, Bahru is a resolute character, confident about his ideas and ready to fight for them.

In Mängəstu’s second comedy, *Ṭälfo Bäkise*, the young generation cuts instead a rather meagre figure, and the protagonists resemble more Araya’s Taddäsä than *Yalačča Gabəčča*’s Bahru. Content-wise, *Ṭälfo Bäkise* is typical of third-generation output, even if Mängəstu’s humour remains far from the tragic and dramatic tone of other third-generation works. Published four years after *Yalačča Gabəčča*, *Ṭälfo Bäkise* tells the story of three young educated

men, Bāzabəh, Wāndayāhu, and Arägga¹⁴³, who describe themselves as ‘the crème of the youth of today’ (Māngəstu 2009: 42), but also ‘confused and confounded’, ‘with nobody to show them the way’ (2009: 54). Their grand plan is the classic pro-*zāmānawinnāt* attempt to hybridise tradition and modernity: ‘by combining the good elements from the traditions of the outside world with the elements from our own ancient culture’, they reason, ‘we can achieve a compound tradition’ (2009: 46). They decide that the traditional practice of marriage by abduction is particularly suited to be salvaged in the modern era. Having observed that ‘the best element in the modern European culture of marriage’ (2009: 46) is simplicity, they decide that ‘a simple marriage is our platform!’ (2009: 47), and conclude that marriage by abduction, being the ‘simplest form of getting married’ constitutes ‘the particular element in our marriage custom that is really consonant with modern civilization’ (2009: 46). They see themselves as ‘men of action’, as opposed to philosophers like their friend Gälagle, who ‘do nothing’ and ‘let you do nothing’, and whose spirit is ‘dead’ (2009: 38). They, on the contrary, will pave the way for the new generation (‘the lucky ones!’, 2009: 58), setting an example for their descendants to follow:

We are the ones who clear the way, we are the openers of the gate, we are the torch-bearers. And this steep uphill road along which we pass falling and rising again, those who come after us will pass without impediment (2009: 54)

What they appreciate about the past is that ‘in those days men were men and women were women!’ (2009: 28) and indeed the day when they put their plan into action and abduct a girl is for them the moment when ‘we are proving we are men’ (2009: 26). They kidnap a ‘modern’ girl: educated, dressed in Western fashion, with an office job. When she fights back – and she fights back with the symbols of her modernity, scratching her aggressors with her long nails and kicking them with her high heels – they are taken aback. Indeed, the girl, Taffäsäčč, profoundly intimidates them, and, after they lock her up in a room, nobody dares entering and speaking to her for fear of being hit. Her hostile reaction is clearly not in line with what their idea of femininity: ‘the lioness!’, says one (2009: 41) and ‘she is a man!’, comments another a bit later (2009: 43). The irony of the plot is that they abduct Taffäsäčč to prove to themselves they are as ‘males’ as their forefathers, but, once Bāzabəh locks himself in the bedroom with Taffäsäčč to consummate the marriage, he is so doubt-ridden that, far from even touching her, he phones her father to confess the kidnapping instead. Taffäsäčč herself tells Bāzabəh that the ‘reason why you had to fail’ is that ‘you were just like [...] little children, make-believing, play-acting’ the ‘manly deed’ (2009: 63).

Contrary to Bahru, Bāzabəh is veritably an anti-hero, torn by his own admission by ‘the duality between man of thought and theories and man of action and duty’ (2009: 63). All of the

¹⁴³ In his English translation of the play, Māngəstu added a fourth character, Yəshak.

protagonists, in the end, emerge as disoriented, at a loss. Talking to a photo of a *Fitawrari* (Wāndayāhu's father), Bāzabəh wonders:

Are we really your children? You didn't theorize... you didn't learn the chemistry of empty words... you did your duty. You didn't lose your guts on the brink of action. With you a man was a man, that was enough! You were not tied hand and foot with the golden chain of so-called 'education' and 'modern civilization'. No, we are born of you only in the flesh, in body. We have not inherited your spirit. We have not taken after you (2009: 63).

The image of *səltane* as a 'golden chain' is very effective in describing how Western-style education is at the same time a privilege and a burden, and how the young generations keenly feel that it is upon themselves to redefine and modernise Ethiopia's customs. Hesitant and doubtful, they long to be like their forefathers, who, in the figures of the *Fitawrari* and a *Näggadras* (Taffäsäčč's father) arrive on the scene in the third act as charismatic, firm and self-assured authority figures, and quickly set out to settle the situation. The *Fitawrari* is described in Māngəstu's stage directions as a larger-than-life, formidable figure, successful 'man of action' and successful 'man of thought' at the same time:

Fitawrari is a man of action, a man who effortlessly combines thinking and doing, a man who does not waste his time nor turn his head with useless thoughts and over unnecessary sentiment, who is free from the nagging accusations of a too-sensitive conscience, who has lived his life like a man, a man who has not been infected by our modern disease called 'Western Education' (2009: 63).

He appears on stage brimming with joy: the house servant has just told him that his son Wāndayāhu had abducted a girl. He immediately thinks that Wāndayāhu is the groom and that the marriage had already been consummated. Speaking to Wāndayāhu, he says that day is the best of his life:

For a father's true happiness is not when he is blessed with a male child, with a son; but when that son becomes a man! This is what happened today. [...] I was afraid for you my son, worried on your account; I have told you that many a time before. But from today onward there is no doubt whatsoever that you are a man, have become a man; you have taken after your father at long last! (2009: 79).

The *Fitawrari* is soon to discover, to his dismay, that the prospective groom is Bāzabəh, and not his son. Devastated, he confides to the *Näggadras*:

No, I have a male child but I am not blessed with a son that is a man. I did hope this son of mine would someday grow up to wield my spears and shield. Well, now that he is

already 25, what does he do? He has abandoned my legacy in favour of the dry parchment of that *debtera* uncle of his. In short, Negadras, ever since the introduction of A, B, C, D, people have been completely spoiled, real men are hard to find in the country (2009: 82).

He then lashes out at Wändayähu:

Enough of your philosophising! Don't drag in your theories now! I have told you before, philosophy is not in your line. What we need are men of action [...]; men of 'thought' – there is always plenty of them – yes, you seven-tongued ones, [...] the market-place is glutted with the tribe of you! (2009: 84).

The older figures of the *Fitawrari* and the *Näggadras* admit that the times have changed; the *Fitawrari*, for example, despite having married his own wife in a marriage by abduction, remarks that those were 'the days of Mənilək' and is shocked that a 'modern girl' could be abducted 'just like that!' (2009: 86). Modern men are not 'men' anymore, and modern women are equally not 'women' anymore. The *Fitawrari* is distraught by what he sees as a disastrous overturning of gender roles:

You know what I saw? I saw women actually wearing trousers, walking along Churchill Road! I could not believe my eyes: women in trousers, men with no trace of beard on them! (2009: 87).

The comedy concludes, of course, in a happy ending: Taffäsäčč confesses to her father that the marriage had not been consummated, but that she has nevertheless fallen in love with Bāzabəh and intends to marry him anyways. The *Fitawrari* and the *Näggadras*, on their part, have reached the conclusion that 'this modern generation, they are not worth getting so angry for, they don't deserve it' (2009: 89). Mängəstu, too, seems to have lost hope in his contemporaries.

In *Tälfo Bäkise*, the failed hybridisation of modernity is openly denounced, but the theme had already been hinted in *Yalačča Gabəčča*. Wäyzäro Alganäš so describes the woman she has chosen for Baharu to marry: 'her Europeanization is only on the surface – a matter of clothes and hair-do, of Amharic accent, of the way she walks and talks. It has not percolated deeper' (Mängəstu 2009: 121)¹⁴⁴. Characters only 'superficially modernised' recur in later literary production, for example in Daññaččaw Wərku's *Adäfrəs* (1969/70). *Adäfrəs* opens with another landlady, Wäyzäro Asäggaš who, like Wäyzäro Alganäš, is trying to make a young woman appear as 'marriageable' as possible. Wäyzäro Asäggaš is preparing to receive a group of sophisticated guests from Addis Abäba and wants her daughter to favourably impress them. For the previous months, she had prevented her daughter Šiwäne from studying modern science,

¹⁴⁴ She repeats the same concept at page 127.

but now she exhorts her to dust her books off and revise them, on the grounds that ‘it is not bad to appear sophisticated and civilised in the presence of urban dwellers – you have to be modern in your manner of speech, clothing and even in your poses’ (Daññaččāw 1969/1970: 22). She recommends her daughter to speak in ‘tongue of the *fārānjočč*’ [white foreigners], so that the visitors would see how up to date they are: ‘they have to know that Asäggaš is not just a simple lady!’ (Daññaččāw 1969/1970: 22). Wäyzäro Asäggaš is here planning to use a façade of modernisation to increase her family’s social standing in the eyes of the new urbanised elites. Both Wäyzäro Asäggaš and Wäyzäro Alganäš, in other words, think of *zämänawinnät* only as a fashionable status symbol and a mark of prestige. Under this outside veneer, no real hybridisation takes place.

Despite the parallelism between Daññaččāw’s Wäyzäro Asäggaš and Mängəstu’s Wäyzäro Alganäš, the two authors and their works are profoundly different, both in tone and in the way they relate to *zämänawinnät*. *Ṭälfo bākise* pokes fun at Ethiopian youth in a light-hearted way while later third-generation works like *Adäfrəs* are much darker. Mängəstu, in this sense, could be seen as an author who lies between second and third generation – biographically, too, he is around a decade older than most third-generation authors. The pro-*zämänawinnät* fervour of the first two generations of intellectuals cools down in the works of the third generation, who starts questioning whether Ethiopia’s modernisation project is really bringing about the desired benefits. Disillusionment starts to seep in about the West and about the government-sponsored idea of *zämänawinnät*. Contrary to Mängəstu’s buoyant satire of the ideological clumsiness of Ethiopian educated youth, in *Adäfrəs* the characters’ struggle to balance competing cultural inputs is marked by anguish and failure. The next chapter further develops the comparison between Mängəstu and Daññaččāw when discussing how Ethiopian intellectuals accused their peers to have failed to conjure up the hybrid modernity they set out to achieve.

Cultural reductionism

The analysis of Ethiopian political thought leads to a similar conclusion to the analysis of Ethiopian philosophy of history: political ideas and historiographical ideas are both constructed from a unicentric point of view that fails to account for cultural alterity. Critics were surprised, for instance, about how briefly and superficially Europe is described in books praising Western modernity and advocating the Europeanisation of aspects of Ethiopian society. The experiences of the characters abroad are always treated briefly and superficially, with few descriptions and few details of their lives overseas. In Həruy’s *Addis Aläm*, for example, ‘precious little’ is said about ‘[Awwäḳä’s] experiences in Paris other than he studied languages and crafts (none cited specifically)’ (Kane 1975: 113). Similarly, ‘Araya’s stay in France is apparently uneventful, for little is said about it other than he attended the College of Agriculture

at Griogne. [...] The things he sees there are largely summed up in generalities: tall buildings, clean, paved streets, industrious people' (Kane 1975: 113). The novels praise European achievements (and decry its materialism) without analysing and historicising European culture and society.

Europe is described by Ethiopian intellectuals as the cold land of machinery, of science, reason and industry; a land that has abandoned Christianity for the new capitalist religion of greed and avarice; where individualism prevails, there is no sense of community and each competes with each other for power and money. The West is treated as a uniform bloc with little regional differences from country to country. Its ideology is monolithically treated in an essentialist way as the one and only Western philosophical current, in which all Westerners equally believe. Internal cultural critiques, ideological disagreements, socio-political struggles and the various Western sub-cultures and countercultures are for the most part ignored by Ethiopian intellectuals. This leads, as we shall see in relation to the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia, to a number of simplifications, or sometimes misinterpretations, of European history.

Japan was studied in a similarly one-dimensional way. The Ethiopian Japanisers only had 'the faintest acquaintance with Japanese history' (Bahru 2008: 209). Their claim that Ethiopia and Japan were, until the Meiji revolution, at the same stage of social development was, Bahru remarks, essentially mistaken (2008: 208-209). The comparisons with Japan and attempts to emulate Japan's historical trajectory 'suffered all too often from inadequate understanding of pre-Meiji Japanese history' (Bahru 2002: 4). The argument that Ethiopia and Japan were comparable societies was based on an assimilationist reading of Japanese history, which selectively picked elements of apparent similarity and overlooked the vast differences that existed between pre-Meiji Japan and 1930s-1940s Ethiopia. Bahru concludes that 'the impassioned pleas of the 'Japanisers' remained a subjective urge unsupported by objective reality' (Bahru 2008: 210). As noted in the previous chapter, history is again asked to conform to a political ideal, and bent to demonstrate a political point.

Both the xenophilia and the xenophobia that Ethiopian intellectuals alternatively felt towards various aspects of non-Ethiopian people were accompanied by a reductionist way of reading non-Ethiopian histories and societies. The cultural other was never analysed *per se*, but either in competition with the Ethiopian self or as an extension of the Ethiopian self. In the Ethiopian philosophy of history just like in Ethiopian political thought, 'the scrutiny of the regimes of truth in which alterities have emerged, deployed, and transformed' was not undertaken (Elizabeth 2010b: 41). In the next chapter, this thesis will go on to argue that this would prove one of the major reasons behind what pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals denounced as their own ideological failure.

Chapter 4 – The failure of pro-*zāmānawinnāt* intellectuals?

What went wrong? *Käšäfa* ('failure') in Ethiopian historiography

The notion of failure has become a constant presence in the works of Ethiopian historians, who are increasingly concerned about the problem, in their formulation, of 'what went wrong' in Ethiopian history. Conflicting interpretations exist of what such failure entails. The term has been used extensively, but without being defined. The very same idea that something 'went wrong' in Ethiopian history has acted more as a generic sentiment than being articulated as a rigorous academic research question. This chapter analyses how the idea of failure has been discussed in historiography, how it has informed the study of Ethiopian intellectual history, and whether it can shed light on the political thought of the first, second and third generations.

The term most used in Amharic to translate 'to fail' is the verb *käššäfä*, which also means to misfire, fail to go off (in reference to a gun) or miss the mark. In general terms, when talking about Ethiopian history, *käšäfa* ('failure, abortion of a plan, misfiring') is identified with Ethiopia's present-day developmental backwardness, poverty, lack of peace and lack of democracy. Already from this brief summary, it is evident that the historians lamenting Ethiopia's *käšäfa* are generally representative of anti-EPRDF social forces. The first definition of *käšäfa* comes from ethno-nationalist scholars, whose arguments are discussed in detail in chapter 6. One exponent of this school of thought is Merera Gudina. His contention is that 'as the result of the five accumulated grand failures of the Ethiopian elite in the twentieth century, the perennial quest for peace, democracy, and development continues to be as elusive as ever' (2003: 141-142). The five 'accumulated grand failures' he identifies are one per historical epoch, from the 'expansion and consolidation of the empire-state' from the 1850s to 1900 to the 'emergence of an "ethnocratic state"' in the post-1991 period. Merera's conclusion is that 'the attempt to build a nation by a dominant elite with hegemonic aspirations and a top-down approach for more than a century has failed to produce the desired result' (2003: 160). His focus is therefore on the persistence of a centralist mentality and on the tenacity of the country's internal border.

Discussions around Ethiopia's *käšäfa*, however, mostly came from those contemporary historians, many of whom identify as Amhara, that still retain a fascination with the Grand Narrative. An example is Mäsfən Wäldä-Maryam's 2012/13 *Mäkšäf ƏndäItyopya Tarik* ('Failing like Ethiopian history'). *Mäkšäf* is the infinitive form of the verb *käššäfä*, therefore the title directly refers to the key word in the historiographical debate on 'what went wrong'. Mäsfən reinstates many of the central tenets of the Grand Narrative, among which the idea that Ethiopia's present-day borders have always been the borders of the Ethiopian 'nation'.

Consisting of a virulent attack on post-1991 ethno-nationalism, which for Mäsfən has sealed Ethiopia's historical failure, *Mäksäf Əndä-Ityopya Tarik* has attracted criticism for its anti-Tigrayan bias (Mäsfən does not hide his hostility towards Yohannəs IV). Not unsurprisingly, the book proved hugely controversial in Ethiopia, and has ignited wide-ranging debates among Ethiopians on whether Ethiopia is a 'failed state' (or a 'failed society') and whether it has a 'failed history'.

Discussions on *käšäfa* are widespread in Ethiopian historiography with reference to development and democratisation¹⁴⁵, but have also been central, more specifically, in the field of Ethiopian intellectual history. Various groups of intellectuals have been accused of having 'failed', and the accusation refers both to conceptual and practical failures. Conceptually, Ethiopian intellectuals have been accused of having failed to theorise a workable and effective model of *zämänawinnät*. Practically, the intellectuals have been accused of having failed to implement the reforms Ethiopia needed. This chapter revisits in particular the criticism vested on the first three generations by the fourth generation. Fourth-generation students in the 1960s lucidly highlighted some of the shortcomings of older intellectuals, in particular their connivance in Haylä Səlasse's authoritarian government. Their arguments, though, were later lost in the darker years of the Därg, with which the ideas of fourth-generation Marxist radicals were irremediably compromised. In historiography, the failure for which the students blamed the old intelligentsia shifted to the students themselves. The Ethiopian Student Movement is at the centre of many debates on 'what went wrong', and historians have debated the merits and demerits of the students by contrasting them with the first, second and third generation. The historiography of the ESM, and particularly the historiography produced by former ESM members, has been highly influential in the way the first three generations have been assessed in historiography. Three interpretations have been put forward contrasting the old generations with the students. As we shall see below, Yonas Admassu and Teshale Tibebu have argued that the students failed, while praising the old generations. Andreas Eshete has argued on the contrary that the old generations' ideology was a failure, while the students were the first to theorise a sensible model of *zämänawinnät*. For other historians, both the students and the old generations failed; Messay Kebede and Merera Gudina both agree with this assessment, although for different reasons.

¹⁴⁵ The most recent manifestation of the debate has been a 2013 special issue of the *International Journal of African Development*. The two more significant contributions are by Vestal and Levine. Vestal, who mostly has politico-economic development in mind, titles his article 'The lost opportunity for Ethiopia: the failure to move toward democratic governance' (2013). Levine, who looks more at long-term historical trajectories, discusses instead 'Ethiopia's dilemma: missed chances from the 1960s to the present', focusing in particular on 'the failure of Ethiopians to pursue constructive options in 1960', year of the failed coup against Haylä Səlasse (2013: 7). Another investigation over the 'failures of modernity in Ethiopia', their material legacy and how they can be documented via archaeology, is by González-Ruibál (2006).

At the same time, this thesis does not want to dismiss the positive, albeit partial, achievements of pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals, and later chapters analyse some of their ideological achievements, particularly those of the third generation. The defensive position of anti-*zämänawinnät* elites is not to be completely discarded either. In the 1920s and 1930s, the anti-*zämänawinnät* diffidence about the West's motives proved much more long-sighted than the pro-*zämänawinnät* often uncritical Europhilia, as the Italian invasion and occupation later demonstrated. There was a strong element of self-interest in anti-*zämänawinnät* opposition to Haylä Səlasse's centralism. Yet, the anti-*zämänawinnät* defence of the system of checks and balances that traditionally limited the power of Ethiopian emperors was not at all unwise, considering the subsequent instability that Haylä Səlasse's centralisation generated.

The next two paragraphs examine the arguments put forward by Ethiopian historians to support their positive or negative assessments of the first, second and third generation. The chapter then focuses more specifically on the idea of 'failure' and reviews three hypotheses put forward by historians to explain the intellectuals' *käšäfa*: the 'failure by education', the 'failure by co-option' and the 'failure by inertia' interpretations. Building on these critiques, the last paragraph offers an additional explanation. In my analysis, the intellectuals' *käšäfa* is to be related to their adherence to the Grand Narrative, with its sense of Ethiopian exceptionalism, with its internal and external border and, more importantly, with its acoloniality.

First, second and third generations: the positive assessments

Those who defended the historical record of the first three generations of intellectuals did it on the base of two arguments. Both are based on the idea that the political thought of the old generations was sound and praiseworthy, but that, unfortunately, the intellectuals did not have a chance to leave a mark in Ethiopia's history. The first argument is that the old intelligentsia had correctly identified the problems afflicting Ethiopia, but the country's authoritarian political environment made it impossible for them to act upon their concerns. In this line of reasoning, the old intellectuals are absolved on the grounds of their powerlessness to effect change. In his 2003 article on Ethiopia's five 'accumulated grand failures', Merera talks about 'the failure to face the challenge of modernization' in the 1900-1935 period and the failure of 'the whole nation-building project' in the 1941-1974 period. Merera attributes these failures not to the intellectuals, but to the unwillingness of political elites to heed the intellectuals' advice: 'sadly, in spite of the advice of the country's emerging modern elite [...] Ethiopian rulers chose to devote their energy, wisdom, and the country's resources to a power struggle, while doing very little to transform the country' (2003: 146). One could object that many exponents of the new 'modern elite', particularly the first and second generation, were either part of the government or had considerable leverage in Ethiopia's political life, and were not a separate class. This objection is discussed more in detail in the rest of the chapter.

The second argument in favour of the old intelligentsia owes much to the current re-evaluation of Haylä Səlassə's reign (Bahru 2014: 39). During my fieldwork, the first three generations of pro-*zāmānawinnāt* intellectuals were described time and time again with a sense of romantic nostalgia by those scholars who are still attached to the Grand Narrative. In recent historical works¹⁴⁶, post-1941 decades are portrayed as the 'golden age' of Ethiopian contemporary history, in contrast with the horrors of the Därg and the loss of identity that, several historians argue¹⁴⁷, was brought about by post-1991 ethno-federalism. For both Teshale (2008) and Yonas (2010), the older generations represented an 'organic intelligentsia that grew out of Ethiopia's traditions' (Teshale 2008: 345), able to hybridise the old and the new¹⁴⁸. Their attempt to 'blend' tradition and modernity was described as the evidence of the ultimate sense of patriotism: they loved their country's past and wanted to preserve their country's identity, but at the same time they fought to improve its future and adapt its identity to the challenges of the 20th century. The students, instead, 'rejected Ethiopia's past as being one reactionary pile of refuse badly in need of cleaning' (Teshale 2008: 345). The 'cultural deracination' (Teshale 2008: 368) affecting fourth-generation students led them to embrace the profoundly Eurocentric paradigm of Marxism. The route that Ethiopia should have followed, the argument continues, is that of early intellectuals, who aimed at developing the country without abandoning its pre-existing socio-political heritage. Marxism and ethno-federalism are regarded with hostility as two 'alien' ideologies, in contrast with the old intellectuals' attempt to revive Ethiopia's past traditions. The hybrid ideological solution of the first, second and third generation would have led Ethiopia to success. The students, on the contrary, failed. This argument is hinged on the assumption that the students were alienated from their cultural roots. Assessments based on the notion of 'alienation', as we shall see below, are frequent in the study of Ethiopian intellectual history, but the rest of the chapter raises a number of methodological objections to such approach.

First, second and third generations: the negative assessments

Not all historians pointed at the early intellectuals' reformism as an example which, if followed, could have resulted beneficial for Ethiopia. Recently, historians have begun to argue that in terms of their ability to implement meaningful reforms, the old intellectuals did not prove, after all, particularly effective, and not because they were powerless, but because their political thought was essentially misguided. The ideological and social position of the first three generations, historians argued, needs to be questioned rather than nostalgically praised, and our

¹⁴⁶ For example Sisay (2003: 71-72).

¹⁴⁷ For example Getachew Metaferia (2005: 214-215) and Mesfin (2005). All of Messay's works advance the same argument.

¹⁴⁸ For a recent example of the same argument, see Fitsum (2015).

understanding of the older generations of pro-*zämänawinnät* elites should be shaped by the awareness of their ultimate failure.

In his review of Peter Garretson's biography of Wārḵənäh Ɖšäte, for example, Richard Reid argues that 'it was precisely the *failure* of [Wārḵənäh's] generation to achieve serious political or economic reform which meant that it was left to a later generation [i.e. the fourth generation], coming of age a decade or so after Warqenah's death in 1952, to lay their lives on the line in order to effect change, for better or worse' (2013)¹⁴⁹. For Reid, their failure was both conceptual and pragmatic. Bahru's 'pioneers of change', he remarks, were

fascinated by some of the accoutrements of modernity, but it takes a leap of the imagination to see them as genuine 'reformers'. [...] It is difficult to appreciate what Warqenah and his peers actually achieved in terms of profound and enduring 'reform' (2013)¹⁵⁰.

Bahru himself, who is certainly sympathetic towards early 20th century thinkers, passes nonetheless a similarly harsh judgement:

Some [intellectuals] contrasted the nation's contemporary state with its glorious past. Other forecast doom if the country did not 'modernize'. Partially, they were successful. Ultimately, they *failed*. And their *failure* has been the *failure* of reformism in Ethiopia (2008: 198)¹⁵¹.

In a series of 2009-2011 lectures republished in 2013, Andreas Eshete offers a balanced comparison between the old intelligentsia and the students. In contrast with the prevalent damning interpretation of the ESM, Andreas defends the students' adoption of Marxism, while at the same time acknowledging that 'the commitment to socialism harbored varied costly illusions' (2013: 14). In his analysis, the students have the merit to have moved past the elitism of the old intelligentsia. Although he refrains from open accusations of failure, he is clearly critical of the old intellectuals' attachment to their class privileges. For this reason, he doubts that they can really qualify as 'modernisers'. The first true modernising movement in Ethiopia ('the midwife of Ethiopian modernity'), Andreas argues, was the ESM.

I maintain it is with the Ethiopian Student Movement that all essential elements of modernity—popular legitimate rule by free and equal citizens, the abolition of all privileges of birth or inherited position, equality of faiths and cultural communities,

¹⁴⁹ Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵⁰ Ezekiel puts forward a similar criticism with regards to Bahru's *Pioneers of Change*. To him, 'the book does not offer thorough explanations as to why the intellectuals' efforts failed to put Ethiopia on a path toward meaningful reform' (Ezekiel 2002c: 129).

¹⁵¹ Emphasis added.

industrialization, and secularism—were championed and advocated together in the name of socialism (Andreas 2013: 12).

Although Andreas is critical of the old intelligentsia, towards the end of his lecture he absolves some writers of the third generation. He mentions in particular Mängəstu Läm̃ma, Daññaččāw Wārku, Şagaye Gäbrä-Mädhin and Solomon Däressa, who in their literary works ‘turned away from the lofty and the representational to look anew at the everyday, the ordinary, and the marginalized’ (2013: 16). As such, Andreas concedes, they could be considered ‘another candidate for the title of midwife of Ethiopian modernity’ (2013: 16). They were, however, confined to the ‘world of beauty’, and the ‘ethos of modernity’ expressed in their works was never translated into political actions (2013: 16). Although that ethos ‘matters’, it was not enough to ‘[prompt] change in the institutions and practices of the practical world’, and its impact was limited (2013: 16). Here Andreas suggests that the failure of the old generations was not so much theoretical, but more prominently pragmatic. Contrary to the students, the third generation never entered the ‘world of action’ (2013: 16).

In contrast with Andreas Eshete’s poised assessment, Messay Kebede is vocal in his denunciation of both the old generations and the students. Both of them, in his account, failed, and their failure was both conceptual and practical. In his 1999 book, Messay argues that the ‘failure of modernization’ in Ethiopia was due to the ‘rise of autocracy’ due to the ‘wholesale defamation of the Ethiopian aristocracy’ (1999: 281). He passes a particular harsh judgement on Haylä Səlassə, who skilfully manipulated the narratives of modernisation and development to consolidate his own power:

the ‘progressive’ policies of Haile Selassie were meant not so much to modernize the country as to establish autocratic rule. It is centralization of power, rather than modernization, that defines his regime (1999: 312).

But, in Messay’s analysis, the intellectuals also failed, chiefly because of their complicity in Haylä Səlassə’s centralisation policies. For Messay their failure was political, in so far as they shared a ‘negative assessment of the nobility and its corollary, the need for autocratic rule’ (1999: 290), but also philosophical, in their misguided conception, according to Messay, that modernisation equals Westernisation (1999: 292). Messay proposes in his works a much expanded notion of failure, and has become one of the most vocal exponents of the interpretative paradigm that attributes the intellectuals’ failure to the alienating effects of Western-style education.

The ‘failure by education’ interpretation

In recent years, more and more Ethiopian scholars have started to point at education as the root cause of Ethiopia’s failure to become an affluent and stable country¹⁵². Messay Kebede is at the forefront of this school of thought (1999, 2003b, 2008a). Messay analyses Ethiopian society through the Marxist base/superstructure model, but reversing the causal link between the two poles. The scholar contends that Ethiopia’s history is characterised by the ‘primacy of the spiritual factor’ (1999: XVI), i.e. that it is fundamentally driven by superstructural phenomena. Messay argues that the abandonment of traditional church schooling in favour of Western-style education produced in Ethiopia a ‘spiritual malaise’ (2008a: 1). Students imbibed Eurocentric ideas, grew apart from their traditions and became culturally alienated. Designed as they were to support Haylä Səlassə’s rule, government schools spread the Eurocentric, autocratic, and anti-aristocratic political vision dear to the Emperor. As a result, Messay argues, all those intellectuals who went through Western-type schools started to despise their cultural roots and embraced a Eurocentric worldview. For all four generations of intellectuals moulded by Western-style schooling, modernisation was conceived as a ‘process whereby the borrowing of Western technology and rationality meant the progressive dissolution of Ethiopian mentality’ (1999: 292). The first three generations were directly responsible for Ethiopia’s ‘failure to modernize’ (1999: 282), but for Messay it was the fourth generation that ultimately sealed Ethiopia’s *kāšāfa*. The widespread ‘cultural dislocation’ (from the title of his 2008 book) initially provoked by Haylä Səlassə’s autocratic ideology and spread by Western-style schools had its most intense impact on fourth-generations students, eliciting their progressive radicalisation and fateful adoption of the ‘alien ideology’ of Marxism. More than structural economic factors, it was such superstructural cultural and spiritual crisis that eventually sparked, according to Messay, the 1974 Revolution.

Messay’s argument has a number of fundamental problems¹⁵³, for example the use of ethnophilosophical categories such as ‘Ethiopian values’, ‘Ethiopian mentality’ and ‘Ethiopian tradition’, which he treats as *a priori* realities and never fully defines. A more troubling problem is that Messay offers virtually no factual evidence to support his bold contentions and unequivocal dismissal of the whole Ethiopian educated class. The lack of documentary evidence is partly a consequence of his use of psychoanalytical categories. He writes about Ethiopia’s past as characterised by a series of mental and emotional pathologies (the aforementioned ‘spiritual malaise’) uniformly affecting at an unconscious level entire social categories like ‘the

¹⁵² The topics of Eurocentrism and alienation have been object of many, often heated, debates on blogs, newspapers and academic publications, especially in the field of education studies. Supporters of the ‘failure by education’ interpretation are too many to list here; see for example Fikre (2007) and Wuhibegezer and Gezae (2014). A 2010 volume edited by Paulos Milkias and Messay Kebede brings together the contributions of the main exponents of this critical reading.

¹⁵³ In addition to those discussed in this paragraph, see Bahru (2014: 7-9).

students' or 'the intellectuals'. For the greatest part of Messay's account, 'the students' and 'the intellectuals' are treated as a single collective entity, with few internal differentiations; only a very small number of individual thinkers are mentioned by name. The relationship between schooling and alienation is similarly described in almost metaphysical terms. Just by attending foreign schools or government schools, young Ethiopians became suddenly and helplessly 'possessed' by the 'demon' of 'alienation'. Another logical problem in Messay's argument is that he assumes a direct relationship of causality between such putative unconscious collective pathology and the 1974 Revolution. This line of reasoning neglects to account for structural phenomena, which, by Messay's own admission, did wield some, but for him secondary, influence in the radicalisation of the student movement. It also neglects to account for the educated elite's cognizant, as opposed to unconscious, political ideas. Particularly troubling is the lack of intellectual agency Messay attributes to educated Ethiopians, who in Messay's account are just passively indoctrinated recipients of Eurocentric propaganda. By translating Ethiopian political thought in terms of personality disorders, Messay's psycho-history effectively negates intellectual history. He indeed decries that 'the great tragedy of Ethiopia' is that 'it did not produce domestic, homegrown intellectuals' (2008a: 100), thus dismissing altogether all the theoretical contributions of 20th century thinkers (1999: 297).

When talking about tradition, Messay makes references to the Orthodox Church and the aristocracy, while alienation is linked for him to the endorsement of socialism (in the case of the students) and the support for Haylä Səlassə's centralisation (in the case of the old generations). Once we move away from Messay's sweeping generalisations about 'Ethiopian intellectuals' to concrete names, his assumption that the more a student was exposed to Western-style education the more he grew alienated soon encounters a number of exceptions. Bərhanu Zārihun was brought up in a very strict Orthodox family and went to church school until he was twelve, but later became one of the few third-generation intellectuals to openly embrace socialism. Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs never set foot in a Western-style school and did his entire schooling (sixteen years) in church, but this did not prevent him from wholeheartedly endorsing Haylä Səlassə's educational vision and from sending his children to government schools. Mäkönnən Əndālkaččāw, praised by Messay for 'his opposition to centralism and autocracy' and for allegedly defending the traditional role of the nobility in counter-balancing the power of the *nəgusä nəgäst* (1999: 295), was in fact one of Haylä Səlassə's most powerful and loyal officials; in his role as Prime Minister and *Ras Bitwädäd*, he oversaw the post-war political marginalisation of the aristocracy and centralisation of power in the hands of the Emperor.

Although Messay is by far the most vociferous exponent of the 'failure by education' thesis, other historians have put forward similar arguments. Paulos Milkias, for example, blames Western-style education for initiating an era of 'cultural confusion and political limbo' (2006:

98)¹⁵⁴. He too believes that the fourth generation of Ethiopian intellectuals was alienated; as opposed to Messay, though, he thinks of politico-economic alienation more than psychological alienation. In contrast with fourth-generation students, second- and third-generation intellectuals ‘integrated themselves into the feudal system, embraced western values and the American way of life’ (2008: 94). The old intelligentsia was Americanised and co-opted via Western-style education. The job market, though, soon became saturated, and did not manage to absorb the fourth generation, who as a result grew into a powerful opposition. The arguments of Paulos and Messay have many points in common with Teshale Tibebe’s conclusions on the ‘cultural deracination’ of the students (Teshale 2008: 368). In all these cases, the only evidence produced to substantiate the existence of such ‘cultural deracination’ is the consequent adoption of Marxism, so Teshale’s, Paulos’s and Messay’s arguments seem all constructed *ex post*.

From the scholarly point of view, this is a missed opportunity, as the issues of whether the Ethiopian higher education promoted Eurocentric epistemologies and of how Ethiopian intellectuals positioned themselves vis-à-vis these epistemologies are certainly important in Ethiopian historiography. If examined as open-ended questions, without reading history backwards with an answer already in mind, they could open up a productive field of enquiry. Exploring what kind of knowledge was imparted by the Ethiopian educational system and what effect it had on Ethiopian political thought is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to note that Ethiopian intellectuals were debating these issues in their own time, and there are a number of sources that historians could draw from for an unbiased and non-teleological investigation. The article on the ‘hyphenated Ethiopians’ discussed below in the chapter is a case in point, and Amharic novels offer additional insights. In Daññaččäw’s eponymous novel, for example, Adäfräs worries that the university curriculum is too skewed towards European disciplines and epistemologies, and with clear reference to Franz Fanon he denounces:

They undermine what is ours, while they want us to appreciate their ideas. Our students are not mature enough to think independently; rather they are influenced by foreigners. They do not like what we have. The ideas and cultures that belong to us but cannot be expressed in the English language are worthless for them. [...] In the past, it was your land that was colonised; nowadays, however, it is your personality or mind that is colonised. In the past, our fathers were able to restore their freedom and country since it was their land that was colonised; but now, how can we restore our land and freedom once our personality is colonised? What is our guarantee not to lose our land if our minds and personalities are colonised? Don’t you know that our land is colonised at the same time when our mind or personality is colonised? How can we get back our land and personality? (Daññaččäw 1969/70: 295-296)

¹⁵⁴ See also his 1976 and 2008 articles on the same theme.

So far, though, the argument that the failure of the intellectuals was due to their university-induced cultural alienation does not appear to be supported by convincing historical evidence. The rest of the chapter will focus on less speculative interpretations, first of which is the ‘failure by co-option’ thesis.

The ‘failure by co-option’ interpretation

The ‘failure by co-option’ interpretation focuses on the close and unbalanced relationship between pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals and Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse. For Bahru Zewde,

the marriage of convenience between Tafari and the intellectuals did not remain a happy one. More than they were able to use Tafari, he used them for his objectives of power consolidation (Bahru 1991: 110-111).

Richard Reid similarly argues that pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals ‘tinkered with bits of the system, but in the end were implicated in the steady strengthening of neo-Solomonic power, a highly personalised and profoundly unstable system of which many of the ‘reformers’ [...] themselves fell foul, at one time or another’ (Reid 2013). This chapter analyses to what extent the intellectuals supported Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse and to what extent the Emperor managed to manipulate the intellectuals to increase his own political supremacy. Historical sources are challenging to use for this type of analysis. Because in the period under consideration all media were government-owned and all published materials were subject to censorship, it becomes complicated to evaluate the relationship between intellectuals and the government, and verify the hypothesis that the intellectuals’ failure was due to their being co-opted by the Emperor. The analysis of primary sources naturally produces the impression that the educated class enthusiastically endorsed all of the Emperor’s moves – thus confirming the thesis of co-option. However, a perfectly valid objection could be raised that this impression is just an effect of censorship, and does not necessarily mirror the ideas of the whole of the Ethiopian intellectual class at the time. The following paragraphs probe into the issue by looking at the nature of censorship under Täfäri/Haylä Səlasse and by looking at the ways dissent could and could not be expressed within the constraints of the imperial system.

Täfäri’s rise to power (1916-1930)

In terms of political allegiance, first generation pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals had at first pinned their hopes on *Ləjj* Iyasu. Täklä-Hawaryat and Gäbrä-Həywät addressed to Iyasu

some of their works¹⁵⁵, hoping the young ruler would heed their advice and implement the policies they suggested. Täklä-Hawaryat was close to Iyasu and became one of his closest confidants and advisers (Bahru 1991: 127). Iyasu, though, was little interested in political theory, particularly as the teachings were coming from the old elites, whom he treated with scorn, imprudently convinced they had all but exhausted their historical role. Discontent mounted among Addis Abäba notables, worried by Iyasu's openings towards Islam, and by the increased power of Iyasu's father Mikael. The young ruler's hedonistic lifestyle, unruly behaviour and 'compulsive tours of the country' (Bahru 1991: 126) further alienated the Šäwän aristocracy. Both Gäbrä-Həywät's and Täklä-Hawaryat's alliance shifted to Täfäri; Täklä-Hawaryat played a significant role in the September 1916 coup that overthrew Iyasu and brought Täfäri to power as co-ruler and heir to the throne.

Not unlike Iyasu, who was only few years his junior, Täfäri grew up among foreigners, was educated by foreign teachers and was fluent in French. Täfäri's and Iyasu's cosmopolitan upbringing strongly contrasted with that of Mənilək and Zäwditu, who had an exclusively religious education. Täfäri and Iyasu were, in this sense, perfect representatives of the new *zämänawi* Ethiopians, but while Iyasu was rash and erratic, Täfäri was patient, perceptive, calculative and a shrewd and diplomatically savvy strategist. Täfäri's most successful quality was perhaps his staunch pragmatism. His own personal convictions always went hand in hand with strategic political calculations. His declared commitment to the modernisation of his country, for instance, was born out of personal ideology, but at the same time also tactically aimed at reinforcing Ethiopia's credentials on the international stage. Täfäri's foreign policy was markedly more internationalist than the one of his predecessors, and achieved one of its most high-profile objectives in 1923, when Ethiopia was admitted to the League of Nations as a member state. The following year, Täfäri's five months long tour of Europe and the Middle East attracted a lot of attention in Western media, and was a successful public relations move¹⁵⁶. In a similar vein, the reforms implemented in the pre-1935 period were always designed with an eye to improve the international reputation of the monarchy. The 1931 Constitution, for example, had the objective, in the words of its main author Täklä-Hawaryat, 'to let foreign governments know that Ethiopia had a Constitution and that its government was therefore constitutional, and to answer allegations of arbitrariness, feudalistic rule, undefined administrative procedures and chaotic government' (Molvaer 1997a: 56). Täfäri's promotion of Western-style education was

¹⁵⁵ In Gäbrä-Həywät's case, this is his historiographical work *Aṭe Məniləkənnä Ityopya* (Bahru 1991: 110), while Täklä-Hawaryat wrote an administration manual and 'a small book of short stories so that Iyasu could learn rules of good moral conduct' (Molvaer 1997a: 52). Both of Täklä-Hawaryat's works have gone lost. In his autobiography, written in the 1950s, Täklä-Hawaryat claims that a third work, his play *Fabula: YäAwrewočč Komediya*, was written for Iyasu and performed for him, but critics have expressed doubts about this claim. It seems more likely that the play was written and staged under Zäwditu's rule in 1920/21 (Molvaer 1997a: 52, Plastow 2010: 138, Lealem and Mahlet 2014: 281).

¹⁵⁶ Albeit a failure from the diplomatic point of view, as Täfäri's initial objective, to negotiate with France Ethiopia's access to the sea, was not achieved.

inspired by the Enlightenment's belief in making knowledge more widespread and accessible, but also aimed at creating a new class of loyal administrators that could gradually replace the old aristocratic elites. Similarly, during his regency (1916-1930) Tāfäri presented himself as the patron of the Ethiopian 'progressive' intelligentsia not only because he shared with the intellectuals the same commitment to *zämänawinnät*, but also because the intellectuals' ideological support increased Tāfäri's leverage in the government.

In other words, Tāfäri skilfully played with the narrative of modernisation to assert the legitimacy of his reign and to pursue his own objectives of power consolidation. In this, he proved extraordinarily successful. Pankhurst, for example, comments that 'Tafari, who was largely concerned with foreign affairs, and in contact with most foreign visitors to the country, succeeded in convincing them that he was firmly committed to innovation' (1964a: 309). The characterisation of Tāfäri as the 'liberal' and 'reformist prince' fighting to 'modernise' Ethiopia in the face of 'conservative traditionalists' such as Zāwditu and *Däjazmač* Balča Safo was, and still is, a routine feature of Ethiopian historiography. Repeated over and over without really being dissected, the portrayal of Tāfäri as the 'young leader of the progressives' remains so pervasive to have become almost an epithet accompanying Tāfäri's name every time his pre-1935 career is mentioned.

Tāfäri and pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals in the pre-1936 period

Before the Italian occupation, and particularly up to Tāfäri's coronation as Haylä Səlasse in 1930, the political scene in Ethiopia was rather fluid, with many regional contenders. Considering Tāfäri's rise to power as 'irresistible', as some historians have done (e.g. Del Boca 2001: 94), is one of the many hindsight biases vexing historical studies on Ethiopia. From the perspective of the actors at the time, the situation was fluctuating and open-ended. The state was still quite decentralised, with several influential political leaders, and, as a consequence, several different political visions, even within the pro-*zämänawinnät* camp. Even after his defeat at the battle of Səgäle (October 1916), for example, Iyasu had a powerful claim to the throne, and his multicultural and multireligious policies could offer grounds for rethinking power relations in the country. Considering the many options available at the time, the intellectuals' virtually-unanimous choice to side with Tāfäri was not at all obvious, and speaks in favour of the co-option thesis. At the beginning, though, the relationship between the heir to the throne and the intelligentsia was not completely one-sided. Tāfäri's ascendancy benefited from the ideological support he received from newspapers and literature as much as the development of media and literature benefited from Tāfäri's sponsorship and patronage.

The close relationship between Tāfäri and pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals never really faltered, as readily demonstrated by reading through the pages of *Bərhanənnä Sälam*, by far the most important source of pre-1936 political ideas. For the whole of the pre-war period

Bərhanənnā Sālam continued publishing poems and articles praising the regent and his policies and arguing in favour of Tāfāri's political line. On the 31st of December 1931, for example, the newspaper published an article praising *Dājazmač* Gäbrä-Maryam's pacification campaign in the Ogaden (September-December 1931), stating that the campaign aimed at establishing a government able to 'guarantee security and [...] administer justice' (quoted in Marcus 1987: 131). The newspaper was again a vehicle of government propaganda in May 1932, as Haylä Səlasse was preparing to move against the Kingdom of Jəmma in Southern Ethiopia, which had been allowed by Mənilək to remain autonomous in exchange for the payment of an annual tribute. According to successive editorials, Haylä Səlasse's measures against Jəmma were a justified response to the hostile actions of *Abba* Jobir, grandson of the old ruler *Abba* Jifar, who, fearing annexation, had decided to build up an army¹⁵⁷. For the journalists of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*, Jəmma had 'invited its own dénouement' and the readers were encouraged to 'lament its bad luck in being poorly governed' (quoted in Marcus 1987: 121). A final example could be the demise of *Ras* Haylu of Gojjam, condemned to life imprisonment in June 1932 for liberating *Ləjj* Iyasu from captivity as part of a plot against the Emperor. *Ras* Əmru, Haylä Səlasse's second cousin, was appointed to replace *Ras* Haylu in Gojjam. *Bərhanənnā Sālam* duly disparaged Haylu:

He has been poisoned [...] by cupidity. His only thought was to accumulate money at any cost, without consideration for the affliction of the poor. [...] He has brooded over plans which would cause the ruin of the whole of Ethiopia and widespread bloodshed (quoted in Marcus 1987: 123).

The events had a big resonance, and over the summer of 1932 a series of poems were published¹⁵⁸, extolling Haylä Səlasse's divinity, comparing him to Biblical kings, and praising his omnipotence and Christian mercy against Iyasu the 'sinner'. On July 7th, a poem by *Dābtāra* Wäldä-Kidan describes the joy of the people of Gojjam at the destitution of Haylu: 'the country of Gojjam has been healed', saved by the justice of *Ras* Əmru ('the sun of the world'), here compared to Solomon. The poem closes with a praise of Haylä Səlasse (who 'exalts the humble and humiliates the powerful'). On August 4th, a poem by *Aläḳa* Təsfa-Hunañ equates Haylä Səlasse ('master of the seven virtues of the Holy Spirit/of the seven provinces of the Ethiopian kingdom') to David fighting against the Philistines and calls him the 'Noah's ark' of Ethiopia ('the ship of salvation that will never break'). Closing the 'Gojjam cycle' was a poem by Zawge Wäldä-Şadək on the 8th of September, where the author states that, like God created the

¹⁵⁷ See Lewis (2001) and Guluma Gemedā (2002) for a history of Jəmma from 1830 to 1932.

¹⁵⁸ I relied on Moreno (1932) for interpreting the *səmmənnā wärək* ('wax and gold' construction) of some poems. Moreno's article includes more examples of poems about the liberation of Iyasu and *Ras* Haylu's failed plot.

universe, Haylä Səlasse will reconstruct Gojjam ('your justice, Haylä Səlasse, is the justice of God').

The nature and role of censorship under Haylä Səlasse

As these examples show, *Bərhanənnā Sālam* 'was filled with lavish praises for the monarch and the nobility' (Meseret 2013: 37). Antagonistic articles were not completely absent, but they were few and far between, and contained criticism that was mostly innocuous, if not explicitly working in Täfäri's favour (Meseret 2013: 37). Critical articles that made it to publication were generally those 'in the publisher's own interest, or those that would harshly criticise backward practices and at the same time show Tafari as a progressive leader, or simply those generated by contributors criticizing each other on personal opinions' (2013: 37). In the pre-1936 period, censorship orders 'were more in the form of memos than formally enacted laws' (Meseret 2013: 46), but although censorship was rather loose, *Bərhanənnā Sālam* could not have published any articles explicitly critical of its founder and patron. Had there been some dissent, though, the editors could have published neutral, matter-of-fact articles, or articles discussing other topics than the monarchy. In the repressive publishing environment of the time, silence, omission and under-representation were powerful tools in the hands of Ethiopian writers. The praise lavished on Täfäri in almost all issues of the newspaper points instead to an explicit desire to flatter the monarch, and win his favour with overt declarations of loyalty. Evidence like the highly laudatory poems quoted above puts into question Bahru's idea that the pre-war scene was characterised by lively socio-political debates, in contrast with what Bahru sees as the widespread 'sycophancy' of post-war intellectual output (2014: 36). Sycophancy there surely was in pre-occupation press as well, and its presence is all the more revealing of a large pro-Täfäri consensus.

In the post-war period ¹⁵⁹, Haylä Səlasse's rule became more pronouncedly authoritarian, and the number of viable political alliances for the intellectuals was reduced to one. The Emperor gradually eliminated all opposition, starting from Iyasu and his father Mikael in 1916, then moving on to *Däjazmač* Balča Safo in 1928, *Ras* Gugsä in 1930, *Ras* Haylu of Gojjam in 1932, and *Abba* Jifar of Jəmma in 1932. The Italian occupation, by liquidating or discrediting some regional leaders, actually favoured Haylä Səlasse's post-war centralisation of power¹⁶⁰. Cultural institutions and infrastructures increased in number, but were all firmly

¹⁵⁹ This section mostly relies on Meseret (2013), Molvaer (1997a), Plastow (1996) and two interview sessions with Nägaš Gäbrä-Maryam held in May 2013 and September 2014. I am indebted to Michael Thomas and Lideya Tsegaye for arranging and recording the interviews.

¹⁶⁰ Clapham, for example, reflects that 'several powerful noblemen were killed in the war, and more died in the resistance. [...] Provincial leaders were the main losers from the centralised Italian administration. [...] When Haile Selassie returned to Ethiopia, his position was therefore in many ways stronger than when he had left, and he consolidated his advantages by changes which cut at the roots of the nobility's administrative control over the provinces' (Clapham 1969: 21).

controlled by the Emperor. Publishing houses and broadcast media were for the large majority government-owned. Exceptions were the periodicals *Mänän* and *Yälyopya Dəms* (both launched in 1955) operated by the *YäHagär Fəḳər Mahbär*, but ‘the private status of these papers was stressed with a view to giving the Ethiopian monarchy the semblance of supporting a vibrant, free press domestically, thereby appeasing the international community which was criticizing the government for muzzling the press’ (Meseret 2013: 103-104). Print media from the period continued to celebrate the Emperor and the monarchy just like before the war. The daily activities of the Emperor usually took up the whole of the first page, and in the following pages the newspapers documented the activities of other members of the government in order of importance. Often this news was ceremony-oriented, and reported on the Emperor’s attendance to inaugurations, public events, celebrations of national holidays, and the like (Meseret 2013: 109). The relevance of news depended on the person’s social status, and newspapers thus offered a daily visual reinstatement of social and political hierarchies (Meseret 2013: 109).

Censorship, from unsystematic and occasional, became tighter and institutionalised (Meseret 2013: 177), particularly so after the 1960 attempted coup. All articles, and particularly opinion pieces like editorials, had to be approved by the newspaper’s director and then by a night shift proofreader responsible for pre-publication censorship. The director had the right to modify the articles as he pleased without necessarily asking for the journalist’s permission, and it was not infrequent for journalists to find their articles published in their name, but with a new content that did not anymore reflect their opinions. The properness of the articles’ content was meticulously checked by the night shift proofreader, who was church-educated in *ḵəne* and expert in *sämmənnä wärḵ*, the ‘wax and gold’ literary technique whereby the reader has to decipher the text’s ‘golden’ meaning by melting the ‘waxy’ surface of the words. He was therefore specifically trained to spot intentional or unintentional hidden meanings and had to make sure there was no double entendre that may offend the Emperor. Meticulously checked was also the placement of each news item. Editors had to make sure the articles about the Emperor’s activity of the day were surrounded by appropriate text, pictures or ads. Nägaš Gäbrä-Maryam, for example, who worked for many years as editor of *Addis Zāmān*, ran into trouble for juxtaposing an article about the Emperor with an article containing photos of cows (Meseret 2013: 109-110).

Nägaš describes a climate of fear, inducing journalists to practice rigorous self-censorship. When sensitive news had to be handled and the decision whether an article was publishable or not was particularly hard, each delegated to his superior. The journalists deferred the decision to their editor, the editor to the paper director; at times, the Minister of Information himself was consulted, and in some cases Haylä Səlassə was personally requested to give a final verdict on a piece of news. The Emperor was very active in monitoring newspapers and publications, and often got angry at his subordinates if something he deemed inappropriate

made it to publication. To cover domestic affairs journalists had to resort to ‘safe news’, i.e. ‘news issued directly by the government’ (Meseret 2013: 113), which meant that after covering the Emperor’s and the top politicians’ mundane activities the newspapers reproduced word by word official circulars and proclamations. International news (for which Ethiopian journalists depended on international news agencies like Reuters) was also ‘safe’ and was used to fill up the rest of the issue. Post-publication censorship could also happen, with entire stashes burnt after printing, sometimes for reasons that Meseret consider ‘childish’ (2013: 112) for example for fear that a typo in an article or an accidental smear of ink near the name of the Emperor could be misinterpreted as intentionally disrespectful.

Just like newspapers and magazines, all printed books had to go through pre-publication censorship and the author had to make sure the book had the censor’s seal of approval before being distributed. Authors almost always had to pay for publication expenses and sometimes had to distribute the books themselves. Censorship could be a very frustrating experience. The censor may require the writer to edit the manuscript two, three, four times before finally approving it. There were no official guidelines for censors, so the feedback given and the changes required were often arbitrary, and two censors could force the authors to edit the text along completely different lines. The censors, too, worked in fear of paying the consequences for not spotting something potentially controversial and therefore often erred on the safe side by consciously over-editing and over-cutting.

Theatrical pieces were routinely censored as well, starting with the *cause célèbre* of Täklä-Hawaryat’s *Fabula*, the first play in Amharic and the first one to be banned. After the ban on theatrical production was gradually lifted from the late 1920s, plays kept being closely monitored, even if they were only staged before small and selected audiences in semi-private environments such as the court and government schools. In his diary, for example, Wärkənäh complains that in 1929 Täfäri cancelled a student play because he thought it ‘too strong’ (Garretson 2012: 129). In the post-1941 period, some scripts were suppressed in their entirety, and were never performed; some scripts were performed, but were later denied publication in printed form. The Emperor often had the last word and actively intervened to decide what could be performed and what not. Plays could be interrupted, and more than once the Emperor walked out of the theatre in disdain halfway through the show (Plastow 1996: 96). Theatres could be closed down if the plays they staged were deemed inappropriate, or subtler forms of boycott could be implemented: in one instance, the government had all the chairs removed from the Creative Arts Centre to prevent the performance of one of Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən’s plays (Plastow 1996: 98). Haylä Səlasse nevertheless continued to enjoy theatre, to attend performances and to meet with playwrights in person. He often took an active role in promoting the authors’ careers; Täsfaye Gässässä, for example, entered theatre because personally

encouraged to do so by the Emperor, who offered him a government scholarship to study the subject abroad (Molvaer 1997a: 229).

Despite the repressive climate of fear, punishment very rarely turned violent. According to Jane Plastow, for example, Haylä Səlassə ‘never locked up a playwright’ (Plastow 2013: 60). The most common fate awaiting writers and journalists who published controversial material was temporary suspension from their jobs. More serious cases resulted in the person being fired and permanently losing their position. Even here, those who got fired could ask influential friends to intercede for them, or could publicly apologise to their superiors, and they often managed to get rehabilitated and restored to their previous posts. Occasionally, the person could be detained in jail for questioning for one or two nights. Some intellectuals temporarily retired to private life whenever they felt their personal circumstances were becoming risky (Plastow 1996: 101).

The most severe forms of punishment were extended prison sentences and internal exile. Abbe Gubāñña wrote some novels that, in their depiction of corruption, economic exploitation and widespread poverty, were judged inflammatory by the authorities. Attempts were made to divert him from writing, and he was offered a job as a high-ranking provincial administrator, but he refused. More repressive means to silence him were opted for, and Abbe spent a total of five and a half years in prison and detention, in Addis Abāba and Illubabor. The longest sentence (three years) came after the publication of his novel *Alwällādām* (‘I don’t want/refuse to be born’, 1962/63), where an unborn baby tells his pregnant mother that he does not want to be born in a world (the novel is set in an imaginary country but the references to Ethiopia are obvious) so full of poverty, injustice and suffering. Kane comments about the novel that ‘it is surprising that anything this frank received permission to be published’ (1975: 194); in any case, the novel was promptly banned.

Täsfaye Gässässä had problems with the authorities when he directed a play by Mälaku Aššagäre called *Alām, Gizenna Gänzāb* (‘The world, time and money’) that was closed by the authorities because, Täsfaye told Molvaer, it was ‘thought to be political’ (Molvaer 1997a: 230). Täsfaye was taken from his office and kept in a police station till late in the evening; he was about to be arrested but was finally released, probably after intercession by somebody (Molvaer 1997: 230). In 1968, Bäalu Gərma was suspended for six months from his job at the Ministry of Information (Molvaer 1997a: 342). Bərhanu Zārihun was temporarily suspended from his editorship of *Addis Zāmān* around 1964/65 for being unwilling to prioritise the news regarding a government-sponsored beauty contest in Addis Abāba. Maintaining that there were more pressing events to report than the beauty contest, he defied the government’s instructions to cover the beauty contest in the first page and moved the news item to the third page. As a further provocation, he placed in the first page the news of a beauty contest for frogs organised

in South Africa. He was suspended from his job for the rest of the duration of the beauty contest, but was allowed to keep his salary and was reintegrated four months later when the beauty contest was over. He soon incurred, though, another, and much more serious, incident when he approved, apparently in good faith, the publication of a review of Abbe Gubäñña's novel on Emperor Tewodros (*And Lännatu*, 'His mother's only child', 1968/69). Abbe had made a point in *And Lännatu* of explaining how Tewodros was descendent of Solomon, and thus a legitimate claimant to the Ethiopian throne. The reviewer commented in his article that Tewodros's legitimacy as king did not derive from his belonging to the Solomonic line; what made him a legitimate ruler were only his skills and virtues. Against Abbe, the reviewer was thus suggesting that access to the throne should be based on meritocracy rather than ancestry, and this went against the 1955 constitution, which stated that only the descendants of Solomon and Sheba could become Ethiopian emperors. In his role as editor, Bərhanu was deemed responsible for the publication of this inflammatory piece. He was fined and permanently suspended from the editorship of *Addis Zämän*, but again was allowed to keep his salary (Molvaer 1997a: 331). He had a third clash with the authorities when he published an article on *Mänän* spurring Ethiopian women to become more politically active. The emperor summoned him to the imperial palace, claiming there was no need for Ethiopian women to become involved in politics, and therefore no need to stir unrest by encouraging them to do so (Molvaer 1997a: 331).

Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən spent one day in prison for some controversial lines in one of his plays, and many of his works were censored over the years (Plastow 1996: 95). He very usefully provided Kane with a list of all his works that were denied permission to be published – a total of five (Kane 1975: 195). Not all of them were political in theme, and many were suppressed because they were thought to promote immoral types of behaviours. As reported by Kane, one was felt to be 'too leftist' and a second one, titled *Asķäyyami Ləjağäräd* ('The ugly girl') was censored as it was feared that the 'ugly girl' allegorically represented Ethiopia. Kane summarises the plot of the other three works: a love story complicated by class conflict; the parallel stories of a virtuous houseboy and his dissolute, hedonistic young master; the story of a poor labourer whose son made a living picking up cigarette butts. It is unclear why the censor found the three stories problematic. The first two plot types (the 'marriage of unequals' and the clash between a character embodying 'tradition' and one embodying 'modernity') are among the most common in post-war Amharic literature, so it is not immediately evident how Şägaye's treatment was different and more contentious than that of his predecessors. Kane (1975: 194) was also able to consult the unpublished manuscript, still carrying the censor's interventions, of a novel by Pəwlos Ńoñño titled *YäSäkkaram Şango*. The novel talks about a group of owners of drinking establishments who come together to form their own assembly (the title means 'assembly of drunks'). The censor 'struck out several allusions to the United Nations', which is

the main satirical target of the text, but also, probably for moral reasons, ‘a reference to the whole world getting drunk’ and, more enigmatically, perhaps fearing racial connotations, ‘a reference to Black and White whiskey, which has a black and a white terrier on the label, as *wəšša* (dog)’ (Kane 1975: 194).

The aforementioned examples point to the need not to automatically assume that censored works contained elements of antagonism against the government. Moral considerations also played a central role, but ultimately, lacking clearly-defined official guidelines, censorship was an idiosyncratic matter. Media censorship was not so much aimed at thwarting political opposition, but, in most cases, was rather a performance of power on the part of the government. The fact that it was inconsistent, contradictory and arbitrary meant that it could strike at any time, whether the author was in good or bad faith. This unpredictability generated in the intellectuals an acute sense of vulnerability and dependency, forcing them to constant self-discipline and self-control. It also fuelled the general climate of sycophancy, as intellectuals became more proactive in their manifestations of devotion to the crown in order to preventively accumulate a good loyalist track record in case censors questioned their political credentials.

Circumventing censorship

For authors critical of the government there were, however, ways to bypass censorship¹⁶¹. In literature, criticism can be embedded in a subtle way without alarming the censors. For example, a writer can have a character criticise the government, and then being proved wrong, defeated or punished. The good characters win the day, but in the meantime the criticism has nevertheless had a chance to be articulated. Such seems the case, for example, of *Adäfrəs*, where the students’ arguments against the Emperor are discussed, and promptly rejected, by both the eponymous protagonist and *Ato Wäldu*.

To circumvent censorship, one strategy was to set the novel in an invented far-away land – as seen above, it was adopted among others by Abbe Gubäñña, whose *Alwällädəm* is set in the imaginary island kingdom of Izraelos. Another example is Pidris, the fictitious town on a fictitious island in the Indian Ocean where Kajela Wačo’s *Taṭäḵənna YäAläm Säw* is set (‘Taṭäḵ and YäAläm Säw’, 1963/64). A third instance is Mängəstu Alämu’s *Amäsägənəšallähu* (‘Thank you’, 1964/65), which portrays corruption and nepotism in the mythical province of Kondo where the administration is in the hands of ‘worshippers of Phallus and Venus’ (Kane 1975: 53). Kane considers this latter novel a good example of the use of allegory for political criticism, observing that ‘the obscurity or better, indirection, provided by allegory provides a convenient means of expressing criticism without drawing down upon the author the invidious

¹⁶¹ This section does not focus on the *nature* of criticism, but looks more generally at the *presence* and *possibility* of criticism.

attention of the authorities' (Kane 1975: 53). As a final example of allegory, Taddässä Libän's short story called *Tənnəşu Ləjj* ('The small child', one of the five short stories collected in *Mäskäräm*, 1956/57) talks about a boy who, educated by his parents to always remain silent in the presence of adults, is afraid to answer the questions of a guest in his house. The guest asks whether he loves his father and mother, but the boy keeps silent. Once the guest leaves, the child catches up with him and, finally outside of his parents' house and away from his parents' ears, he answers all of the guest's questions. The story, Taddässä told Molvaer years after its publication (1997a: 303)¹⁶², is really about the lack of freedom of speech and expression in imperial Ethiopia, when the political situation was so tense and oppressive that people, like the boy in the story, were afraid of even answering the question whether they loved the Emperor (their 'father') and the country (their 'mother').

Another way to indirectly comment on the Ethiopian political system was by talking about apartheid in South Africa. Nägaš Gäbrä-Maryam reports that

the veteran broadcaster Asamnew GebreWold had to criticize conditions in Ethiopia by proxy, so to speak. For example, he used to magnify the oppression in apartheid South Africa in order to criticize government repression and archaic practices in Ethiopia (quoted in Meseret 2013: 113).

Apartheid South Africa was used as an allegory to talk about Ethiopia's domestic authoritarianism in Täsfaie Gässässä's play *Əkəw* ('The thing') and in Alämayyāhu Təlaye's novel *Täfaraj Yaṭṭa Däm* ('Blood for which no one sought justice', 1970/71), both telling the story of a black South African character fighting against the white supremacist regime¹⁶³. Kane aptly remarks with regards to these two works that

it is undoubtedly not lost on the authors that one cannot criticise the system of justice in a foreign country without bringing into question the system in one's own. [...] Much of the criticism aimed at South Africa is not without application closer to home (1975: 187-189).

Containing indirect political messages were also, in all likelihood, the works belonging to what Kane calls the 'Theodore cycle' (1975: 160). The life story of Emperor Tewodros II was one of the most recurring themes of post-1941 literary production. Many of the major Amharic

¹⁶² A general problem with the interviews conducted by Molvaer, though, is that they all took place in the highly repressive time of the Därg, when many of the older intellectuals, especially those who had been prominent and successful figures under Haylä Səlässe, had to defend and justify their ideological credentials. It is therefore possible that the authors claimed in the interviews that some of their earlier works contained hidden subversive meanings to demonstrate they had always been 'on the right side' even before the Revolution.

¹⁶³ The analysis of South African-themed literary works will be further developed in chapter 6.

authors devoted to him one of their works, including Gərmaččaw Täklä-Hawaryat (*Tewodros*, 1957/58), Mäkonən Əndalkačaw (the drama *Ṭaytu Bəṭṭul*, 1957/58), Bərhanu Zärihun (*YäTewodros Ənba*, ‘Tewodros’s tear’, 1965/66), Abbe Gubäñña (*And Lännatu*, ‘His mother’s only child’, 1968/69), Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam (the English-language novel *Warrior King*, 1974) and Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən (the English-language *Tewodros*, 1966)¹⁶⁴. Except for Mäkonən’s work, who portrays Tewodros in a highly negative light¹⁶⁵, all other writers present Tewodros coherently with the Grand Narrative as the Ethiopia’s first great ‘unifier’ and ‘moderniser’. But within this mainstream treatment, the figure of Tewodros was also used to reflect on the nature of power, on who has the right to rule, on who is a just king – topics that had a clear bearing upon the Ethiopian political situation at the time of writing. Tewodros’s fictional speeches often include his hopes for the future of Ethiopia: what he wants (or prophesises) Ethiopia to become and not to become, how he wants (or prophesises) Ethiopia to be ruled. In addition to this, the supposedly humble origins of Tewodros allowed the writers, as in the case of the review on *Addis Zämān* mentioned above, to hint that power should be assigned by merit and not by blood (Yonas 2010: 78), thus potentially undermining the role of the Solomonic myth in legitimising imperial rule. Another historical figure used by Amharic writers to discuss contemporary political issues is *Abuna Pētros*, the Orthodox priest executed by the Italians during the occupation, whose story is fictionalised in Mäkonən Əndalkačaw’s *Yädām Dəms* (‘The voice of blood’, 1954/55) and Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən’s *Pētros Yaččən Säat* (‘Petros at the hour’, 1969)¹⁶⁶. Just like Tewodros, the character of Pētros prophesises about Ethiopia’s future and describes his own vision of what Ethiopia could and should become. It is up to the reader to decide whether the vision of the two patriotic martyrs (so are Tewodros and Pētros represented) has concretised in the reader’s present or not.

Despite the lack of freedom of expression, therefore, there were limited, but not completely insignificant, possibilities of expressing criticism. Censorship was pervasive, but not all-powerful, and punishment, at least in some cases, could be avoided via negotiations, intercessions or timely retreats from public life. Freedom of speech was severely curtailed, but the system was based not so much on repression but rather on inculcating in writers and journalists the habit of self-censorship. The system worked more on self-imposed discipline than violent coercion. Although possibilities to obliquely express criticism existed, the vast majority of authors did not make use of them. Only few intellectuals willingly defied censorship and many were reprimanded, much to their dismay, for pieces they had written in absolute good

¹⁶⁴ Taye (1983) offers a full account and detailed analysis of the role of Tewodros in Ethiopian historical fiction.

¹⁶⁵ Greenfield talks about Mäkonən’s *Ṭaytu Bəṭṭul* as one of the ‘attempts on the part of members of the aristocracy to defame [Tewodros’s] memory’ (1965: 75). Greenfield says that the book ‘aroused considerable resentment, for Tewodros is highly thought of by very many Ethiopians and particularly by younger folk of more progressive outlook’ (1965: 75).

¹⁶⁶ Pankhurst (1973) discusses how *Abuna Pētros* was represented in Ethiopian theatre.

faith. Things were to change under the Därg, when freedom of expression was further curbed, and whoever published or broadcasted material not in line with party ideology risked long jail sentences, corporal punishment or even death (Meseret 2013: 222)¹⁶⁷.

Under Haylä Səlasse, the self-censorship practiced by all writers and journalists was not only a defensive strategy to avoid trouble, but was also a sign of consent. Intellectuals disciplined their language also because they genuinely did not want to offend the Emperor. Some, like Gərmaččäw thought that censorship was justified (Molvaer 1997a: 68). When Nägaš Gäbrä-Maryam talks about the ‘climate of fear’ in which journalists lived, on the one hand he refers to the fear of losing one’s job, but on the other hand he refers to the reverential fear for the person of the Emperor. The respect for the Emperor, but even more for the monarchy as an institution, was rarely questioned by the members of the first three generations of Ethiopian intellectuals, and self-censorship was willingly pursued as a way to demonstrate such respect. Many authors went far beyond what censors required of them, and tried to surpass one another in praising Haylä Səlasse and his reign. The fact that dissent was muffled explains why there were no openly anti-imperial publications, but not quite the amount of praise and devotion bestowed on the Emperor in cases such as the ones described by Molvaer:

It is common in Amharic books printed during the period 1930-74 to meet a picture of the Emperor at the front, and the year of publication is often accompanied by the year of the Emperor’s reign in which the book was published. A few have laudatory words addressed to the Emperor, and, in rare cases, an author may preface a ‘letter’ to him at the beginning of the book. This may be done in admiration of the Emperor or to show one is a loyal subject, or to be noticed and possibly rewarded, or maybe also in the hope of making one’s views known to him and thus becoming a kind of unofficial guide or adviser to the Emperor (Molvaer 2008: 28-29).

Even when accounting for the lack of press freedom and freedom of expression, it seems possible to conclude that Haylä Səlasse had a very large base of support among the educated urban intelligentsia of the post-war period. This conclusion is further substantiated by two counterfactuals. Even in contexts where the Emperor’s censorship did not operate, criticism to the monarchical system appears to have been extremely rare, and the tone and content of newspapers printed abroad, in freer publication environments, are similar to those of

¹⁶⁷ The most high-profile example was that of Bäalu Gərma. After 1974, he rose to a position of great influence in the Ministry of Information. Perhaps overconfident about his status in the government (he was very close to Mängəstu Hayla-Maryam himself), in 1983 he published a novel, *Oromay* (a word adapted from the Italian ‘ormai’, which means ‘at this point’, implying ‘it is too late’), where he satirised corrupt members of the ruling party and criticised the way the government had handled the Red Star campaign in Eritrea. He was immediately fired and the novel (which had already been printed and distributed, and was proving very popular with the readers) was banned. On the 14th of February 1984 Bäalu was abducted from his home and ‘disappeared’, never to be seen again. For more information, see Tadesse Adera (1995).

newspapers printed in Ethiopia. The journal of the Ethiopian Student Association in London in the 1940s and 1950s, for example, had a title that paid close homage to the imperial narrative: ‘The Lion Cub’. Here, Ethiopian students abroad are metaphorically pictured as the cubs of the Emperor, whose royal symbol was the lion and whose royal slogan included ‘The Lion of Judah has conquered’. The publication’s title is an explicit endorsement of the Grand Narrative’s conception of the Emperor as father of the nation. More significantly, the conscious infantilisation of the Ethiopian students (the self-defined ‘cubs’ of the Emperor) underlines the relationship not only of devotion, but also of dependency and voluntary submission, between Emperor and intellectuals.

Published abroad, outside of the reach of the Emperor’s censorship, were also many English-language novels by Ethiopian writers. Writing in English became increasingly common in the 1960s, when many writers turned to international publishers to avoid domestic censorship. But even these publications do not significantly depart from the imperial narrative, nor criticise the system in its entirety¹⁶⁸. The evidence analysed in this paragraph allows to conclude that in Ethiopian publications of the time of Haylä Səlasse there are limited traces of dissent not so much because of censorship restrictions, but rather because there really was little systemic dissent among the first three generation of Ethiopian intellectuals.

Dissent under Haylä Səlasse

Although almost all pro-monarchy in their political ideology, Ethiopian intellectuals held a diversified range of opinions about the person of Haylä Səlasse. The intellectual who always remained the closest to the Emperor was the ever-faithful and ever-opportunistic Həruy Wäldä-Səlasse. Other members of the first generation had a much more troubled relationship with the imperial palace. In his diary, Wərķənāh Əšäte mentions a number of disagreements with Täfäri and often notes his frustration when Täfäri did not heed his requests and advice; starting from 1945, he rapidly lost influence at court. Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam, notoriously independent-minded, rebellious and intransigent, was condemned by the regime to serve various terms in jail; he, too, was completely marginalised after the war.

The Emperor’s decision to leave the country after the 1936 defeat at Mayčäw proved very controversial, and remained one of the bigger bones of contention in the post-war period. In 1941, Haylä Səlasse’s return was not welcomed by everyone in Ethiopia, and those who opposed the Emperor had fairly persuasive and legitimate reasons to do so, given the Emperor’s dubious leadership record during the occupation. And yet, at liberation most intellectuals duly stuck by the Emperor’s side, and dissent remained limited for the two decades to follow. The trauma of the occupation, if anything, strengthened the intellectuals’ patriotic sentiments and

¹⁶⁸ One example is Abbe Gubäñña’s *Defiance*, analysed in chapter 5.

their cohesion around the Emperor, ‘who took advantage by increasing Amhara hegemony’ (Ricard 2004: 55). Members of the second generation proved perhaps the most zealous devotees of Haylä Səlasse; the works of Mäkonən Əndalkačāw, Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs and Käbbädä Mikael pay explicit homage to the Emperor and eulogise his reign, often in hyperbolic terms. The least supportive intellectuals are to be found among the third generation, who, despite a generally benevolent view of the Ethiopian monarchy as an institution, grew increasingly disappointed at the way the country was run. Bərhanu Zārihun and Abbe Gubāñña were, among third-generation authors, the most antagonistic towards the government and more sympathetic towards the student movement; they both warmly supported the Revolution, at least in its first stages. Many third-generation intellectuals, alongside some second-generation ones like Haddis Alāmayāhu and Gərmaččāw Tāklä-Hawaryat, advocated a transition towards a constitutional monarchy, with more powers devolved to the parliament and a greater autonomy for the executive (Yonas 2010: 76)¹⁶⁹.

This theoretical commitment to reform, though, almost never resulted in political action, as apparent in the background of the 1960 coup¹⁷⁰. Gärmame Nəway’s first chosen course to obtain the desired reforms was to organise the intelligentsia in associations that could act as political pressure groups. His attempts to politically mobilise his fellow educated Ethiopians, though, were all frustrated. Few responded to Gärmame’s calls for a more active political commitment. Isolated and disappointed by the intellectual elite, Gärmame turned to the military, and enlisted the support of his elder brother, Mängəstu Nəway, head of the Imperial Bodyguards. It is difficult to establish when Gärmame first started considering the option of a military coup; at any rate, ‘the conditions of the post-war intelligentsia in the late 1950s seem to have persuaded him that peaceful means of struggling for reforms were no longer possible’ (Tekeste Melake 1994: 294). The intelligentsia was uninterested in radical change, and even Gärmame and Mängəstu proved quite reluctant in questioning the Grand Narrative.

The Bodyguards took over the imperial palace on the 13th of December 1960, while the Emperor was on a state visit in Brazil. For their radical political gesture, the political programme of the plotters was remarkably mild, at least judging from the radio announcements and documents they produced before the coup was crushed on the 15th of December¹⁷¹. The political vision of the coup makers did not significantly depart from the pro-*zämänawinnät*

¹⁶⁹ Abbe Gubāñña advocated a constitutional monarchy in his *Məlkəam Säyfä Nəbälbal* (‘Məlkəam [proper noun] Sword-of-Flame’, 1963/64). Political change, in the novel, is envisaged through elections and non-violent means. In the plot, the main character is author of two books, *Krəstyanənnätənnə Soşalizm* (‘Christianity and socialism’) and *Däm Yällaş Törnät* (‘Bloodless war’).

¹⁷⁰ The 1960 coup, to date, has not been properly researched. For more background information see Greenfield (1965), Clapham (1968), Tekeste Melaku (1990 and 1994), Molvaer (1996), and Berhanou (2001).

¹⁷¹ For the full text of these proclamations, see Greenfield (1965: 388-389 and 402-403).

ideology described in chapter 3. The monarchy *per se* was not put into question: the coup makers were clearly envisioning a transition towards some form of constitutional monarchy. The crown prince Asfa Wässän was asked to read the rebels' first proclamation on the radio, announcing that a new government would be formed under his authority. Particularly relevant, for example, is the 'complete absence of any mention of the Emperor Haile Selassie in all of [the coup makers'] propaganda' (Clapham 1968: 502). The aura of holiness projected by the Emperor and the reverential fear he inspired were, in 1960, untarnished:

[The coup makers] attacked his Government in general terms, but the Emperor himself was so widely revered that they could not attack him without shaking even that support which they already possessed (Clapham 1968: 502).

The imperial narrative was so all-pervasive that the plotters had to operate within it, challenging it from within. Clearly, 'the rebels were working in an atmosphere in which radical policies would not have been approved' (Clapham 1968: 503). Except for a bigger emphasis on the role of the state in economic development, the programme of the coup makers was not very different from that of the unseated Emperor:

The policy statement which [the rebels] made was moderate, even rather dull. [...] The policy statement seems to have been designed not to give offence to any major interest, and it contained nothing that could not have been (and very little that had not been) said by Haile Selassie. [...] The difference between the rebels and the existing Government is largely one of tone (Clapham 1968: 502-503).

The argument of the plotters was not that they had an alternative political programme that worked better for Ethiopia than Haylä Səlassie's. The plotters' claim was rather that they were better qualified than Haylä Səlassie to carry out Haylä Səlassie's own political programme. Object of the rebels' condemnation of the imperial regime was Ethiopia's '*stagnation* [...] rather than, say, its oppression or corruption' (Clapham 1968: 503)¹⁷². No reference was made, for example, to themes like freedom of expression and freedom of association. What was being contested, once again, was the *pace*, and not the nature, of change. The coup eventually failed for lack of support. The Church, the army, the provincial centres and the populace of Addis Abāba all remained loyalist. The consensus was, the plotters soon realised, in the Emperor's favour.

The agency behind the coup was almost exclusively military. Even the university students were 'bewildered', 'taken by surprise', and only fleetingly supported the coup with leaflets and demonstrations before quickly falling back into line when the loyalist forces

¹⁷² Emphasis in the original.

suppressed the rebellion (Balsvik 1985: 94-100). The old educated elites did not play any role in the planning or execution of the coup, and did not take any official position, either in favour or against the plotters:

There was a total graduate *elite* of roughly 400-500. Yet, of all these, only four were definitely committed to the coup. [...] Very few, if any, Ethiopian graduates came out for the coup who had not been in the secret beforehand, though certainly many wavered until they could be sure which side would win (Clapham 1968: 500).

The coup nevertheless had a profound impact on the old intelligentsia and on some high-profile second-generation intellectuals in particular. Less than two months after the coup, Haddis Alāmayāhu wrote an important internal dispatch to the Emperor, urging him to liberalise Ethiopia's political system in order to avert further challenges to his rule:

[Haddis] emphasised the fact that the measures that had been taken so far were quite inadequate, particularly in bringing about economic development and expanding education. He recommended the revision of the constitution with a view to initiating genuine parliamentary rule and ministerial responsibility. A radical concept that he introduced was the need to state clearly in the new constitution that sovereignty resides in the people, and not in the monarch, as was stated in the 1955 constitution. He also argued for unfettered freedom of public demonstration and expression, including the introduction of the private press (Bahru 2014: 63).

Gərmaččāw was too prompted into action, and he joined up with five other top politicians, some of whom were top military officials that had proven pivotal in the suppression of the coup. The petition that they sent to the Emperor advocated, just like Haddis's memorandum, a revision of the constitution 'with a view to instituting proper parliamentary rule and investing the prime minister with full authority' (Bahru 2014: 64). The petition, again like Haddis's memorandum, was ignored and its authors, like Haddis, relocated to provincial and ambassadorial posts (Bahru 2014: 64).

Haddis later re-elaborated his ideas in a 1963 booklet titled *Ityopya Mən Aynāt Astādadār Yasfālgatal?* ('What kind of administration for Ethiopia?'), but he only dared publish it after the Revolution. The very same fact that Haddis published his booklet after the Revolution shows how out of touch the old intelligentsia was with the students and with the way the political consensus had shifted towards socialism. In the opinion of Addis Hiwet, *Ityopya Mən Aynāt Astādadār Yasfālgatal?* was 'bourgeois critic at its best' (1987: 50). Just like in his first memorandum, Haddis championed a transition towards a less centralised and more democratic form of monarchy, and in this he was representative of the kind of change favoured by the third-generation. Albeit reluctantly, after his 1961 memorandum Haddis nevertheless

continued to faithfully serve Haylä Səlasse until the Revolution, and made no other incisive attempts at promoting structural change. All in all, the reforms advocated by Gərmaččāw and Haddis were aimed at improving the country's situation as much as at protecting the elite's own position, which after the coup was threatened by the growing resentment for Haylä Səlasse's politics.

The third generation had with the imperial palace a particularly contradictory relationship. They resented Ethiopia's authoritarian political system and were lucidly aware of the country's economic underdevelopment; yet, they could not shackle off the inherited fascination for the Grand Narrative. Good example of this ambivalence is Daññaččāw Wārku, one of the few intellectuals of the third generation to be briefly associated with student politics at the very beginning of the 1960s. Highly critical of Haylä Səlasse's regime, he gave a dark representation of Ethiopia's decadence in *The Thirteenth Sun*, whose plot revolves around a dying *fitawrari*, quite daringly modelled after the Emperor (Wren 1974). Despite this strong political stance, Daññaččāw talks about Haylä Səlasse in a way that shows a noticeable degree of deferential respect and even affection:

I liked him, you know, despite his drawbacks; I liked the Emperor, but then, I felt I didn't understand him. There came a time when I considered him a rotting corpse somehow that each of us is carrying, and I felt as if I were carrying that disintegrating corpse on my head. Even then, I couldn't be so harsh at all that, because inside me, I couldn't be totally negative. He is such a fellow, a little fellow, and, yet, you know, a dynamite. It is this dynamite that — there was this self-restraint anyway when I wrote (quoted in Wren 1974).

Just like Daññaččāw, many third-generation authors interviewed by Molvaer had affectionate memories of Haylä Səlasse, particularly those who attended flagship government schools in Addis like the Haylä Səlasse I Secondary School, whose management and activities the Emperor was closely involved with (Tekeste Melake 1994: 285). Taddässä Libän told Molvaer that 'he always loved the Emperor' and went on recalling the weekly visits paid by the Emperor to the students of the Haylä Səlasse I Secondary School (Molvaer 1997a: 301-311). Every week, the Emperor made sure the students ate well, behaved well and were treated well, and interrogated them on the new notions they had learnt. This fatherly posture proved very effective in impressing the pupils, many of whom were boarders living far away from their families. During my stay in Addis Abāba many former students (or children of former students) were happy to share with me their memories of the period; even those who declared to have been critical of Haylä Səlasse's rule proudly told me many warm-hearted stories of their vicinity to the Emperor while they were enrolled in school.

Quite interestingly, there seems to be no correlation between how much third-generation authors incurred censorship and their political position regarding Haylä Səlasse. As is to be expected, some of the censored authors, like Abbe Gubäñña, were very critical of the Emperor, and the repression they suffered probably exacerbated their hostility against the government. Other intellectuals who fell victim of censorship, though, were supportive of Haylä Səlasse, and the experience of censorship did not alter their fondness for the Emperor. Täsfaye, some of whose plays were shut down by the authorities, confessed that he ‘revered Haylä Səlasse very much’ and considered the Emperor ‘part of Ethiopia’ (Molvaer 1997a: 229). This further supports the idea that Haylä Səlasse’s system worked at the highest levels of society based not so much on top-down repression, but rather on bottom-up fear and consent.

In conclusion, there was more opposition to Haylä Səlasse’s rule than censorship allowed to transpire, and a number of first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals were critical either of him or of some of his choices. Censorship created an impression of homogeneous intellectual consensus for the Emperor, but dissent was somewhat more widespread than available historical sources suggest. And yet, consent, if not enthusiastic approval, for the Emperor and the monarchical political system continued to remain by far the dominant ideological position of pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals. Haylä Səlasse’s right to rule was rarely (if ever) questioned. Among the educated elites, dissent was circumscribed, and in any case never systemic. The nation continued to be identified in the figure of the king and *zämänawinnät* as a by-product of kingship. For pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals, the ‘discourse of the modern nation’ remained ‘founded in an irreducible monarchical patriarchy – in which the ruler, by his exemplary moral and divine qualities, expressed the collective will’ (Elizabeth 2010: 91).

The co-option interpretation, therefore, accurately captures the top-heavy relationship between Emperor and intelligentsia. The first three generations of intellectuals were one of the most solidly pro-Haylä Səlasse social forces. They endorsed the Emperor’s political vision, promoted the imperial ideology and validated the country’s socio-political system, even if at times they mildly criticised the country’s enduring backwardness and the inefficiencies and abuses of some members of the ruling class. Haylä Səlasse profited from his alliance with the intellectuals much more than the intellectuals did. With the intellectuals acting as his propaganda agents, the Emperor managed to reinforce his political position. In turn, the intellectuals gradually lost their autonomy, and became increasingly powerless without the Emperor. Freedom of expression and freedom of association were both progressively curtailed. The Emperor managed to keep the educated elites dependent on him, immediately intervening to sever horizontal networks of association and solidarity as they emerged.

The notion of ‘co-option’, however, needs to be qualified. A distinction needs to be drawn between first and second generation on the one hand and third generation on the other. Among first- and second- generation intellectuals, the endorsement of the imperial social hierarchy and economic system was firm. They were sometimes critical of the misconducts and mismanagements within the system, but never questioned the system itself; sometimes they proposed moderate reforms to retouch the socio-political and economic structure, but never envisioned radical changes; sometimes they felt frustrated at the slow pace of the reforms, but never questioned Haylä Səlassə’s long-term political vision. In the case of the first and second generation, the support for the system was generally a conscious and enthusiastically-embraced choice. Some second-generation exponents, such as Gərmaččāw and Haddis, were shaken by the 1960 coup, and petitioned the Emperor asking for a liberalisation of Ethiopia’s political system, but did not pursue this option further once Haylä Səlassə turned down their suggestion. In their subsequent inaction, Gərmaččāw and Haddis were similar to third-generation intellectuals.

In the case of the third generation, the pro-Haylä Səlassə consensus thrived rather on a passive lack of opposition. Third-generation intellectuals grew much more critical of the system than their predecessors, but because of their compliance with the regime, it was against the third generation that the fourth generation was particularly bitter. From the students’ point of view, first- and second-generation intellectuals had been co-opted into endorsing and spreading imperial ideology, but third-generation thinkers, despite being critical of that ideology, never attempted to theorise and implement an alternative political model. The option of a constitutional monarchy, favoured in theory by many, was never pursued forcefully. Because the third generation had identified as critical the same social problems that worried the students, the students were all the more disappointed by the failure of their seniors to act upon these concerns. In the eyes of the students, their immediate elders had failed because, even if critical of Ethiopia’s socio-political situation, they never actively committed to changing it. In other words, the fourth generation accused the third of ‘failure by inertia’. This interpretation, as we shall see in the next paragraph, is a variant of the co-option thesis, since it points at economic co-option as the main cause of the intellectuals’ political apathy.

The ‘failure by inertia’ interpretation

The accusation against the third-generation of ‘failure by inertia’ came from various fronts. First in line were fourth-generation students, who disparaged their elders for talking about reforms while hypocritically holding onto their socio-economic privileges, and for their lack of collective political mobilisation. Foreign scholars based in Ethiopia in the 1960s described the old intelligentsia in ways that are not dissimilar from the students. Even more significantly, third-generation writers themselves agreed with the criticism raised against them.

They were aware of their own generation's socio-political shortcomings, and in their works they extensively reproached what they saw as their generational peers' apathy and ineptitude.

The criticism of the third generation by the fourth generation and foreign observers

Fourth-generation students conceded that in Ethiopia's authoritarian system the intellectuals' freedom of expression had always been limited, but nevertheless believed that, even within these restrictions, their elders could have done more. As a result, 'disillusionment with and outright moral condemnation of the role of the educated elite was prevalent in comments by younger Ethiopians connected to the university and was directed mostly at the educated in political and bureaucratic positions of power' (Balsvik 1985: 65-66). Older intellectuals were reviled for what the students saw as petty selfishness and ideological hypocrisy. The dissertations of Girma Amare (1964), Taferra Work Beshah (1964) and Bahru Demissie (1970) well summarise the reasons why the students were disappointed by their seniors ¹⁷³. Older educated Ethiopians were accused of talking about 'progress' and 'modernisation' without ever concretising their words into actions, enjoying in the meantime a comfortable and privileged socio-economic position in the highest levels of state bureaucracy. Their commitment remained merely verbal, and in the end they renounced their personal convictions to pursue money and power (Taferra 1964). Addis Hiwet accuses the old elites of having a 'self-contented *nouveaux riches* mentality' (1975: 90) commenting that 'the wide vista of ministerial and vice-ministerial portfolios, departmental headships and provincial governorships seduced every one of them, and dissipated their political coherence and organisation' (Addis 1975: 90).

Many scholars underlined the non-committal attitude characterising the texts of pro-*zāmānawinnāt* writers. Bahru, who has an otherwise very positive opinion of first- and second-generation thinkers, admits that 'most of the writings of the intellectuals of the period rarely went far beyond a description of the apparent ills of Ethiopian society'; except for Gäbrä-Həywät, they 'scarcely managed to go to the economic roots of the problem' (2002: 111). The old intelligentsia 'did not seriously discuss how progress and change could be achieved' (Balsvik 1985: 64), and indeed 'if one seeks specific indications of the direction Ethiopian authors want their country to take in future, what sort of change and what kind of society they want, one will find that few of them commit themselves to any programme or to any precise answers' (Molvaer 2008: 231). Yonas similarly argues that third-generation intellectuals desired a substantial (but not revolutionary) social change, but 'in the absence of any single orientation or a positive program of action (in the strictly political sense), it seemed that everyone was

¹⁷³ See Teferra Haile Selassie (1997: 66-67) for another example of the very negative way in which the students saw their elders.

intent upon chipping in their share of ideas and feelings in an apparently random fashion' (Yonas 2010: 75).

The hypothesis could be advanced that older generations of intellectuals benefited too much for the system to be willing to seriously question it; the material incentives were simply not there for them to become politically engaged. The arguments against the old intelligentsia were conditioned by the economic climate in which the students operated, and the fact that many young graduates struggled to find employment contributed to their acrimony. The students' precarious socio-economic position 'enhanced their own feelings of impotence' (Balsvik 1985: 138). The criticism towards the educated elites was bitter and unforgiving, but according to Balsvik 'there is more than a grain of truth' in it, as many early idealists after finding rewarding jobs 'came to rationalise change as a gradual process which could be promoted within the system' (Balsvik 1985: 66-67). The economic underpinnings of ideological battles are evident in the fact that 'older graduates were disillusioned by how easily students dedicated to change, progress and ideals gave up once employment was secured; contrary to their convictions, they became servants of the status quo and a regime of which they disapproved and privately condemned' (Balsvik 1985: 138-139).

Besides the issue of economic co-option, the students' accusation of failure rested on a second argument. Older intellectuals, the fourth generation charged, never joined forces to create opinion movements or political pressure groups. The intellectual legacy of the Ethiopian educated elite, Balsvik concludes, is that of 'inertia': despite some individual contributions, the newly educated 'did not challenge the government by organizing themselves into associations which could form the basis for a system to replace the imperial autocracy' (Balsvik 1985: 67). Later historians also agree that the student generation quickly became a protagonist of Ethiopian politics because it filled the social void caused by the general lack of associational life in the public sphere (Vaughan 2003: 128).

The fragmentation of the intellectual class was deliberately engineered by Haylä Səlassə. The Emperor divested the traditional aristocratic elites of power and replaced them with a system of administrators vertically loyal to him only. Loyalty was rewarded with gifts of money or land or with marriage into important families; dissent, as we have seen, was punished with demotion, banishment and, in the worst cases, imprisonment. The 'atomization' (Levine 1966: 101) of the educated class was reinforced by the pervasive networks of informers reporting to the Emperor, who created among the intellectuals a climate of suspicion and distrust. The government envisioned society not as a 'pyramid' but as a 'column', and actively intervened against any perceived attempts to establish horizontal ties uniting members of the same social group. Meetings were discouraged and infiltrated; discord was often fomented between different sub-factions. Greenfield, for example, describes Gərmame Nəway's struggle

to establish an alumni association for the former students of the Haylä Səlasse I Secondary School and to keep it running against government pressures and internal conflicts (1965: 354-356).

Those who were more resolutely against the system were marginalised and lost their jobs, but never mobilised to form a coherent cultural opposition. The eccentric and secluded life conducted by one of the last Young Ethiopians, Həruy Wäldä-Səlasse's son Sirak, is exemplary from this point of view. An Oxford graduate, Sirak was one of the most high-profile and better-educated members of the Young Ethiopians. He was expected to rise to important government positions, and contribute significantly to Ethiopia's development. The reasons why he retired from government service in the early 1940s are not clear, but his disapproval for the government and desire to maintain a certain moral integrity by not compromising with it seemed to have played a significant role (Molvaer 1997a: 178)¹⁷⁴. He made the drastic decision to permanently retire from politics, and lived the following 40 years as a farmer far away from the capital, in a domestic exile that seems to have been mostly self-imposed, until his death in the early 1980s. He remained a critic, it seems, of Haylä Səlasse's government, but, completely isolated and disengaged from politics, was never perceived as a possible threat. On the contrary, he soon became well-known for his eccentricity. Humorous stories circulated in Addis Abäba about his unconventional behaviour¹⁷⁵, portraying him as a provocative but innocuous social outcast. In the context of such benign mockery, his arguments against the government were never taken seriously, nor did he ever attempt to make them more visible.

Just like Sirak, as a result of society's 'column structure' away from the Emperor the intellectuals were few, isolated, and impotent (Bahru Demissie 1970: 56). This weakness became evident in the power vacuum of the 1960 coup:

Haile Selassie had built up a personal *élite* of officials, some educated and some not, who owed their advancement to him and could therefore be expected to support him. But in the crisis they could do virtually nothing, having no inherent authority, and no power base on which they could call; this is another point at which the absence of any political organisation made itself felt (Clapham 1968: 505).

Clapham further elaborated on this point in his 1969 monograph:

¹⁷⁴ Fictional characters like Araya and Ato Wäldu took a similar decision based on the same reasons. Sirak's choice was evidently not isolated at the time.

¹⁷⁵ One such story goes as follows. Haylä Səlasse was expected to pass through a town close to where Sirak lived. Sirak showed up with twelve donkeys on the road where the Emperor was passing. Haylä Səlasse recognised him, stopped to greet him and asked him why he had twelve donkeys with him. Sirak answered that, since the Emperor had twelve donkeys in his cabinet, meaning Haylä Səlasse's twelve ministers, then Sirak wanted his twelve donkeys too (Molvaer 1997a: 176).

The graduates have notably failed to make the sort of impact on the government which is needed for the effective implementation of the reforms which most of them support. [...] They have not so far provided that driving force which is what the government most obviously lacks. Though active and sometimes successful in their own restricted spheres, they have not seriously affected the foundations of the imperial system of government, and still less therefore have they established the bases of any system which could replace it (1969: 91).

Just like in the case of Clapham, foreign observers who were based in Addis Abäba in the 1960s generally painted a negative picture of educated elites. Greenfield underlined their political disorientation and confusion. They have grown sceptical of old ideologies, started questioning the Grand Narrative, but are struggling to find alternatives:

The dilemma of the increasing numbers of modern educated Ethiopians is precisely this: although they can no longer accept the role of the Solomonic tradition and the concept of being ‘chosen people’ as the basis of the state, any more than they can accept that the Ethiopian Christian Church is fit to be the cement of their society, they are uncertain how to effect a change (Greenfield 1965: 340).

Levine documents how already in the early 1960s people were talking about the ‘failure’ of the foreign-educated intelligentsia:

The returnees as a whole have so far done little either to modernize their country or even to establish themselves as a self-respecting status group. Their *failure* to do so has become one of the most widely discussed questions in Ethiopia in recent years, both among the more self-critical of the returnees and among critical Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian observers (Levine 1965: 198)¹⁷⁶.

It is precisely this issue that Levine’s *Wax and gold* sets out investigate, and the American scholar’s portrayal of the new Ethiopian elites is rather pessimistic:

Instead of being leaders of the new era, they have been little more than misfits of the old. [...] The central quality of life [...] of the intellectuals has been frustration. In the passionate words of one of them: ‘There is a wound, boiling within each and every one of the returnees’. [...] The ideological aspect of this dilemma is that no synthesis of traditional and modern perspectives has yet been effected which has won the adherence of a sizable number of intellectuals and which could serve to energize their transformation of the status quo. Consensus exists only with regard to a vague sense of

¹⁷⁶ Emphasis added.

the inadequacy of the traditional system. There is no sense of direction (Levine 1965: 198).

Levine puts forward here the crucial argument that the *käšäfa* of the old intelligentsia had to do with the inability to concretise in practice the hybrid modernity intellectuals had theorised about. Third-generation writers discussed this problem extensively in their works, and Levine's portrayal was certainly influenced by their own self-representations. Other aspects of Levine's book proved more controversial. Criticism focused in particular on Levine's psychoanalytical methodology. In an insightful review for the *Ethiopia Observer*, Gedamu Abraha¹⁷⁷ disapproves of *Wax and gold*'s 'proclivity to confuse internalized ethics with ideology and reality, which moves Dr. Levine to transform each and every problem, be it political or social, into a moral or ethical problem' (Gedamu 1967: 239). But although his review is highly critical of Levine's text, Gedamu does not disagree with Levine's main findings on the impotence and ineffectiveness of Ethiopia's educated elite:

There is no question that Dr. Levine has found the atmosphere of contemporary Ethiopian society as one which tends to smother the flickering intellectual awareness and consciousness of the new elites. But he has also been perceptive enough to see through a great deal of the sham of the 'intellectuals' and intimates that they are no less morally guilty than the system itself for their banal existence (Gedamu 1967: 231).

Gedamu's own conclusion is not any more generous than Levine's: 'the 'intellectuals' of Ethiopia have *failed* to discern, perhaps because of their intellectual dishonesty, that their so-called frustration is but a convenient cover for their own apathy' (Gedamu 1967: 238)¹⁷⁸. Again, the theme of 'failure' was regularly present in the discussions on the Ethiopian educated class. Gedamu, born in 1937, belonged to the third generation of intellectuals, and his review is a good example of the self-criticism of the third generation. There was little communication between the third and the fourth generation, so the criticism of the fourth and the self-criticism of the third were seldom in dialogue. The fourth generation underlined their elders' economic opportunism and political complicity with Haylä Səlässe's regime, while the third-generation's self-criticism put more emphasis on their own ideological confusion, ethical nihilism and excess of intellectualism. The two lines of criticism, though, agreed to portray the third generation as characterised by impotence, ineffectiveness and inertia.

¹⁷⁷ Born in 1937, he had a training in print journalism, and was head of the press and, later, of the radio under the Därg. Meseret says of him that he 'always stood up to the pressures of the Derg and party officials regarding the way the media should run' (2013: 224). He moved to the United States in 1985, where he died in 2007.

¹⁷⁸ Emphasis added.

The self-criticism of the third generation

Gedamu Abreha expanded his 1967 reflections on the failure of Ethiopia's educated class in an article he wrote with Solomon Däressa in 1969. The article was titled, quite suggestively, 'The hyphenated Ethiopian', and became famously controversial ever since its publication. For Solomon and Gedamu, 'the hyphenated Ethiopian of this age of research and sanitation is also living in an age of anxiety, an age of tension' (1969a: 13). This tension is typical, according to the authors, of Ethiopia's 'transitional situation', where different and sometimes antithetical value systems are available, and the individual has to navigate opposing cultural pushes and pulls (1969a: 13). The hyphenated Ethiopians exist 'in the dual world of ascriptive behaviour and achievement oriented style of life'; unable to reconcile the two worlds, they are 'lost', 'belong no community' and 'have nothing of [their] own' (1969b: 12). Solomon and Gedamu are critical of the 'peacock vanity' of the hyphenated Ethiopian, which they satirise with this example:

The wedding of the hyphenated Ethiopian is a microcosm of his style of life. [...] The one who has a VW borrows a Peugeot for the occasion. The one who has a Peugeot borrows a Mercedes and the one who finds a Mercedes far too ordinary would borrow an American car – the ultimate symbol of the hyphenated ego (Gedamu and Solomon 1969a: 16)¹⁷⁹.

They end up their reflections with the following open question: 'is the Ethiopian a special blend of incongruities and mutually antagonistic elements?' (Gedamu and Solomon 1969b: 11).

In the fictional writings of third-generation authors, characters are indeed represented as a 'blend of incongruities and mutually antagonistic elements'. Yonas has elaborated at length on the third-generation writers' painful portrayal of their own socio-political disorientation:

The disillusion they had about the system seems to have turned, by some alchemy, into disillusion about themselves, about their perceived capacity as educated intellectuals. Some despaired on account of their impotence to do anything, whether for themselves or for the people, the tax payers who saw them through school all the way to the end. Beginning with some of the poems, and later in some novels, the intellectuals of the day were equally rebuked for being too complacent and for the comforts they indulged in while all around them everything smelled of death. They criticized themselves for being

¹⁷⁹ The emergence of cars as status symbols, in substitution to earlier status symbols such as slaves, had started in earnest in the 1920s. *Ras Haylu* of Gojjam had one, but he could only drive it up and down the few existing roads in Däbrä Markos (Pankhurst 1964a: 311). In 1934, Lord Noel-Buxton observed that 'the number of slaves formerly kept by men of importance is being reduced. This is partly due to the use of motor cars, which are becoming more effective as proof of a man's importance – the purpose hitherto served by a display of slaves' (quoted in Pankhurst 1964a: 315).

detached from the people and for cultivating meaningless, alien values that encouraged selfishness to the point of being narcissistic, therefore insensitive to the needs of others. Their education was seen as hollow, too bookish for them to be able to speak the language of the ‘masses.’ They saw themselves as a confused lot, neither belonging here nor there, all in a cultural limbo to which they could attach no meaningful label (Yonas 2010: 79).

Yonas points at elitism, excess of intellectualism, complacency and self-indulgence as the main traits the writers attributed to themselves and their own generation. These themes are treated at length in the Amharic literary works from the period. The novels and plays published in the late 1950s, and even more prominently in the 1960s, are populated by anti-heroes. The young protagonists, often constructed as the alter ego of the author, are hesitant, irresolute, and unable to act upon their ideas. The intellectuals’ impotence and confusion are sometimes satirised, for example, as already discussed, in Mängəstu Lämman’s *Ṭälfo Bäkise*. Mängəstu’s irony is bitter, his criticism is biting, but his works still retain trust in the educated elite’s ability to effect change. The author mocks his characters’ contradictions and awkwardness, but benevolently. Old elites are strong, sure-footed and confident, but they are not spared their share of derision. For all his old-school ideas on family honour and manhood, the *näggadras* of *Ṭälfo Bäkise* is represented as an aging man suffering from high blood pressure, under medical orders not to get upset – orders that his servant enforces very strictly, comically restraining him every time the *näggadras* takes out his gun and threatens to use it. The young generations are a disappointment, but deserve their happy ending. Bāzabəh makes Taffäsäčč fall in love with him and fulfils his desire to find a wife.

The tone changes dramatically in Daññaččāw Wārku’s *Adäfrəs*. Adäfrəs is certainly the character that, at the beginning of the novel, the reader is more drawn to identify with. His ideas are decidedly in favour of *zämänawinnät*, and he persuasively contradicts *Ato Teso*, *Ato Wäldu* and *Wayzäro Asäggaš* on a series of important matters. The more the novel goes on, though, the more Adäfrəs reveals himself a rather pathetic character. Split between conflicting value systems, he finds himself unable to choose a single course of action. Gradually in the novel, his words lose authority and his powerlessness and purposelessness become apparent. He is torn between two women: Šiwäne, portrayed as the representative of old Ethiopia, and Roman, portrayed as a symbol, Daññaččāw explained to Molvaer, of the ‘flashiness of modernity’ (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 299). Adäfrəs inability to choose between the two women, in Daññaččāw’s own interpretation, is meant to show how the character is ‘suspended’ between tradition and modernity:

he cannot live without getting the two together. Therefore he is a tragic figure. Time was not ripe enough to unite the two trends in one person (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 299).

Adäfrəs is incapable to concretise in practice the ‘hybrid modernity’ that intellectuals like him were advocating in theory. The process of de-romanticisation and de-heroicisation of the character culminates in the unceremonious and unemotional way in which Daňñaččāw describes Adäfrəs’s death, liquidating it unexpectedly in the turn of one sentence. In his interview with Molvaer, Daňñaččāw elaborated at length on Adäfrəs’s death:

Adefris is progressive – but he should be progressive with other people. He rationalizes too much. He is not a practical person. Instead of acting, he rationalizes. Rationalization is good but with limitations. [...] Our people can cope with change, but not too fast. [...] There was no other way (out) for Adafris than death – he was too superficial. He could not see reality around him – he speaks one language and the people around him another [when it concerns] who could do something about this country. This is why we *fail* [...] – we are like Adefris. Adefris is the superfluous man in the 1960s. [...] Therefore Adefris dies – he is not whole, he is fragmented and divorced from society (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 298-299)¹⁸⁰.

Daňñaččāw, in other words, depicts Adäfrəs as a hyphenated intellectual, unable to reconcile, in Daňñaččāw’s words, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. The plan to hybridise modernity, Daňñaččāw suggests, has failed. Confronted with what they saw as the failure of their peers, many third generation authors looked back with envy at their elders’ cultural confidence. Just like in Mängəstu’s *Ṭälfo Bäkise*, in *Adäfrəs* old generations are represented in strong contrast with Ethiopia’s spineless and weak-willed youth. Albeit not idealised, in Daňñaččāw’s novel the most morally-coherent and insightful character is *Ato Wäldu*. Daňñaččāw does not hide his predilection for the character, describing him as essentially ‘forward-looking’:

He regards the feudal as backward. He can adopt and adapt. He knows people’s drawbacks, and he sympathizes with Adefris, but he knows that his ideas cannot be realized overnight. [...] He is a whole personality, but not forceful enough to bring about change. The Marxist-Leninists hate Weldu (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 299).

¹⁸⁰ Emphasis added.

Daññaččāw added that because he is not a Marxist, he can sympathise with Wāldu, and indeed Wāldu is closely modelled on Daññaččāw's own father¹⁸¹. Wāldu is far from being a hero: his retirement to the countryside due to his incompatibility to work within the imperial bureaucracy can be read as a form of escapism, and after Adāfrəs's death he is unable to help Šiwāne and Roman and avoid their sad fate. Despite this, Daññaččāw declares to have portrayed Wāldu as exemplary of the old generations' ethical solidness. Wāldu and the old generations are, using Daññaččāw's words, 'whole personalities', in contrast with the split personality of Ethiopia's youth:

Old people had values – they died for their religion, their land, their country. Now we have no such values. If these (values) are ignored – what values are left? [...] Those (old) people want to live because they have values as driving forces. What makes us want to live? We lack such values, or the values are not integrated and a driving force (in our lives) – it is only intellectualism but no more. [...] Our forefathers were actively participating in practical things (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 299).

Just like for Māngəstu, the difference here is between 'men of action' and 'men of thought'. Fathers and grandfathers are portrayed in line with the conventional depiction of the *jägəna*, the hero of old: sure-footed, hardened, and brave. The third generation, instead, is cultured and refined, but weak, frightened and ineffectual. Wāldu's analysis of the shortcomings of the new generations could veritably be assumed to voice Daññaččāw's own verdict on his fellow third-generation intellectuals. Here is how Wāldu describes to Adāfrəs the negative traits of Ethiopian youth:

They say of you: impudence to parents, destruction of the faith, contempt for culture are apparent among you. They say of you: you keep away from your families, you have developed an ill spirit and a life of isolation. Since you learn from professors collected from various Eastern and Western countries who do not stay around long, your results are unsatisfactory. They say of you: you change like chameleons, you have no unwavering convictions, your end result is a defective humanity. They say of you: when professors are given the opportunity to serve a long time, they give you academic training, not a training that which would be a guide to life and which would develop a

¹⁸¹ Other writers pay homage to their fathers in their works. As mentioned in chapter 1, Araya in Gərmaččāw Tāklā-Hawaryat's eponymous novel is modelled on Gərmaččāw's father. Māngəstu Lämma, who like Daññaččāw thematised in his comedies the contrast between old and new generations, wrote a biography of his father, *Māšāfa Təzəta ZäAläka Lämma* ('The book of memories of Aläka Lämma', 1966/67). Another work that well exemplifies the theme of the generational clash is *Abbatənnə Ləjjočč* ('Father and sons', 1966/67) by Təsfaye Gəssässä, contrasting the lives of two brothers, one belonging to the second and one to the third generation. The older of the two brothers is an officer in the Imperial Bodyguards, a man of action and, in Təsfaye's own definition, a 'happy go lucky type', while the younger is an 'introspective' student who wonders about his identity and the meaning of life (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 235).

new generation, so you do not turn into citizens who inspire confidence. They say of you: the education you get in generally unable to distinguish the useful things of former generations from those that are not useful and cannot replace them with useful ones (Daññaččāw 1969/70: 227 quoted in Kane 1975: 116).

Aside from the usual accusations of social detachment and nihilism, Wäldu points at education as one of the root causes of the intellectuals' inability to hybridise old and new cultural traits. He scolds the new generations for being unable to implement the 'supermarket' sociological approach – maintaining the useful things of the past, and discarding those that are not anymore useful. He identifies specific problems in the educational curriculum, particularly the purely theoretical nature of the knowledge imparted, the constant reshuffling of lecturers, and the consequent lack of didactic continuity. Contrary to the 'failure by education' interpretation, though, he does not simply blame schooling as the external cause of the youth's 'defective humanity', but also identifies a strong agency on the part of the intellectuals themselves. Moving momentarily away from the novels' focus on the third generation's failed intellectualism, Wäldu repeats the accusation of socio-economic co-option:

While there are some beliefs that you have obtained in school, when you realise that they do not benefit you when you are engaged in work, I think you abandon them. Even our own companions, so many boasted of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, but when they got possessions, office, high station, we heard them change their tune (Daññaččāw 1969/70: 227).

Many similarities can be drawn between Adäfräs and Goytom, the 'cowardly, dreamy, and talkative' (Taye 1994: 744) character of Daññaččāw's English-language novel *The Thirteenth Sun*. Again, the plot is very simple. An old *fitawrari*, attended by his two children Goytom and Woynitu, goes on a pilgrimage to a shrine on top of a mountain in search of a cure for his illness. The characters, like in *Adäfräs*, allegorically refer to specific social categories. The *fitawrari* symbolises Ethiopia's aristocratic class, and is modelled on Haylä Səlasse himself; his daughter Woynitu represents Ethiopia; his son Goytom the young educated intellectual; and the peasants that host the family for the night are emblems of the lower classes. Goytom reacts to the decay and decadence around him 'either by ineffectual rationalization or by indulgence in escapist wishes' (Taye 1994: 745); his character 'is marked not by active engagement in [the] struggle for salvation but by passiveness, cynicism, self-pitying and withdrawal' (Taye 1994: 745). Like Adäfräs, Goytom lucidly analyses Ethiopian society, and has a clear understanding of its problems, but he is too 'frightened' and 'immature' to prescribe a cure (Debebe 1994: 611). He does not know 'how to destroy the old and build the new, [...] where he stands in the turmoil of conflicts in the society, what his commitment is and to whom his commitment must be' (Debebe 1994: 611). In a moment of gloomy intuition, Goytom asks himself: 'And I am

supposed to save Ethiopia... save her from whom? From myself. I guess?’ (Daññaččāw 1973: 113). Daññaččāw’s own opinion regarding his third-generation peers, by his own admission, is full of disdain: ‘as for the educated class, I gave up hope, I couldn’t see anything coming out of them, most of them frustrated and idealistic’ (quoted in Wren 1974).

The self-criticism of the third generation often turns into expressions of outright despair for the perceived loss of existential meaning, but not all third-generation writers indulged in these feelings of desperation. Some reacted indignantly at their peers’ self-pity, and wrote incensed pieces attacking the shallowness and triviality of their contemporaries. The best example of this type of works is Šāgaye Gäbrä-Mādhīn’s 1965 poem ‘Also of Etiopics’, a veritable generational manifesto whose scathing tone is reminiscent of Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’¹⁸². Šāgaye defines his generation ‘we, the intellectual brain disease cases’ and ‘we, the strange fruits of present chaos’, stressing themes of vainness, purposelessness and superficiality (Abeba 2002: 80-86). The poem starts as thus:

We, the wonder plants of cinema screens
Generation of car-hooters and time-hooted
Children of past ruins and present insecurities
We, of hollow-hearts and jazz-minds
Mockeries who seem to know what we don’t care for
And giants who do not know where to step.

Zāmānawinnāt is here not more than façade of narcissism and self-absorption. The glossy and glamorous lifestyle of cars, cinema and jazz is shallow and smacks of elitism. In another line, Šāgaye underlines the intellectuals’ snobbish detachment from society by talking about their ‘pocketed hands that refuse/To touch the earth our mothers bent to till’. Proud of their education, the third generation has not realised their knowledge is of no use for the country. Frustrated by their own social uselessness, they quarrel with each other: ‘we, the gogmagogs waiting to scratch/Each other’s eyes out’¹⁸³. These two lines allude to the discord and rivalries between intellectuals and their consequent inability to join forces in the political arena. Although Šāgaye is far from idealising the past, underlining instead how brutality, destruction and violence have been constant throughout Ethiopian history, a contrast is drawn once again between old and new generations:

We, the smart smiling sons of smarter sad fathers
We, the odd misfits among your own folk

¹⁸² Full text in Appendix 2.

¹⁸³ The term gogmagogs derives from Gog and Magog, two names that appear in the Bible (Ezekiel and Revelations) as well as in many Islamic traditions. They are enemies of Israel, described as savage hordes.

Who aimlessly drift from day to day.

[...]

We, who like an abandoned ship

Drift in the angry waves of time.

Metaphors of drowning or being lost at sea abound in the poem. Having lost any moral or cultural anchorage, the intellectuals are shipwrecked, floating on the surface, swept away by the current, reduced to a meaningless life of futility and vainness. Ultimately, the poem has at its core the theme of identity crisis, as made explicit in one of the last verses, where the intellectuals are described as ‘we who cry ‘who am I mother!’’, the mother being Ethiopia herself, here begged to give directions to her lost children.

‘Unable or unwilling’?

In 1964, Teferra Work Beshah remarked that up to that moment the Ethiopian intellectual elites had proven ‘unable or unwilling’ to create cultural spaces where to collectively discuss their ideas and devise a comprehensive set of political proposals. Haylä Səlassə’s ban on political activities made it extremely risky to be socially engaged outside of government-controlled spaces, but the question remains open ‘whether the educated elite’s lack of organizational achievement and activity was due to the repressive political structure or to their own apathy’ (Balsvik 1985: 65). From the historiographical point of view, it is perhaps impossible to reach a conclusion on whether the old intelligentsia was more ‘unable’ or ‘unwilling’ to effect change. The two options, of course, do not exclude each other, and the most probable answer is that both factors played a role in what, according to Ethiopian historians, was the *käšäfa* of Ethiopia’s educated elites.

There are differences, though, between the first, second, and third generation. The ‘failure by co-option’ interpretation applies chiefly to first two generations. To various degrees, they all became prominent politicians, and they directly contributed to upholding the imperial system and reinforcing Haylä Səlassə’s power. The second generation comprises perhaps the staunchest supporters of Haylä Səlassə. Attitudes ranged from unrestrained sycophancy (Käbbädä Mikael, Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs, Mäkonnen Əndalkačäw) to loyal service and support albeit in the context of some criticism (Gərmaččäw Täklä-Hawaryat, Haddis Alämayähu). The ‘failure by inertia’ interpretation, instead, applies almost exclusively to the third generation. Contrary to their predecessors, they were from mildly to severely critical of Ethiopia’s state of affairs and desired significant changes in the country’s politics and economics. They enjoyed prestigious and well-paid jobs in the realm of cultural production, but virtually none of them became a politician, government ranks being already filled, most of the time, by their elders. They therefore constituted a social bloc partly separate from the

government, although heavily subordinated to it. Because of their disapproval of government policies, third-generation intellectuals were co-opted only partially. The accusation of ‘failure by inertia’ refers to the third generation’s pragmatic failure to translate their dissent in political actions, due to their lack of political commitment. While the ‘failure by co-option’ and ‘failure by inertia’ critical paradigms focus mostly on *pragmatic* considerations, the next chapters discuss instead the *conceptual* failure of the intellectuals to translate their dissent in an alternative political ideology – alternative, that is, to the official imperial ideology of the Grand Narrative.

Reasons for failure: adherence to Grand Narrative and its acoloniality

Given that the Grand Narrative was the official ideology of the Ethiopian monarchy, it is not surprising to see it divulged not only in Ethiopia-based publications, but also in pro-Haylä Səlasse foreign newspapers such as *New Times and Ethiopia News* and the *Ethiopia Observer*. Fictional and non-fictional works regularly cite the famous passage from the Psalms (68:31) ‘Ethiopia shall stretch her hands to God’. Plays, songs and paintings on the legend of Solomon and Sheba also abounded¹⁸⁴. Among the works of first-generation writers, Afäwärķ’s 1908 *Ləbb Wälläd Tarik* has been read an allegory of Ethiopia’s recent history and ultimate historical destiny. The character of Ṭobbya, representing Ethiopia itself, becomes instrumental in converting a pagan king to Christianity and bringing peace between two long-standing rival kingdoms, a Christian and a pagan one. Second-generation works are equally informed by the Grand Narrative. Käbbädä Mikael’s *YäTənbīt Kätäro* (‘Appointment with prophecy’, 1945/46) is an allegorical verse-play loosely based on the New Testament legend of the Ethiopian eunuch converting to Christianity (Acts 8). The play makes the point that Ethiopia is chosen by God and relates prophecies about her future glory and triumph. In *Ethiopia and Western Civilisation*, Käbbädä similarly maintains that ‘everybody knows that Ethiopia, a millenary nation who maintained her independence in the worst misfortunes, never lost her greatness’ (Käbbädä 1948/49: 77). In a passage of Gərmaččāw Təklä-Hawaryat’s *Araya*, the narrator interjects the story by remarking:

Until today Ethiopia has put her trust in her prayers and in God, but has she ever boasted of her power? Whenever did her enemies leave her in peace? No, all this time God has not abandoned her but kept her all along, placed her by herself, given her honour among the peoples of Africa and Asia. This is certain, this is the unshakable faith of all Ethiopians (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 231, quoted in Molvaer 2008: 159).

¹⁸⁴ For example, Säyfu Yənäsü ‘s *Yädäbub Nəgəst* (‘Queen of the South’, 1960/61) and Ašäbər Gäbrä-Həywät’s *YäNəgəstä Azeb Tarikawi Guzo* (‘The historical journey of the Queen of the Southwest’, 1958/59).

These examples show that perhaps the most appealing characteristic of the Grand Narrative was, for Ethiopian thinkers, its teleological orientation. A first effect of this teleological way of thinking was the ‘fatalism’ that, for Bahru Demissie, led the first three generations of Ethiopian intellectuals to ‘[assume] that progress would simply have to be imposed for it to effect its miracles which were deemed inevitable’ (Bahru Demissie 1970: 46). A second effect of the Grand Narrative’s teleology is to turn cultural difference into temporal lag. As mentioned in previous chapters, the Grand Narrative’s way to rationalise alterity is either by essentialising difference as radical and unbridgeable or by erasing difference via reductionist paradigms. By upholding the Grand Narrative, Ethiopian intellectuals also upheld this essentialisation or cancellation of otherness.

The next chapters argue that mapping the ‘multiple and changing locations of alterity’ (Elizabeth 2010a: 90) is pivotal in understanding 20th century Ethiopian political thought and the failure of pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals. In the third generation’s own analysis, the failure of pro-*zämänawinnät* elites is to be related to their inability to positively hybridise ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. Used in this way, the two terms are rather vague and semantically ambiguous, and the underlying assumption that the two concepts are self-contained and antithetical requires a much more extensive theoretical justification than it is present in third-generation works. What third-generation intellectuals decry as the failure of hybridisation could be rephrased more clearly by referring to the intellectuals’ relation to the Grand Narrative. All the first three generations of Ethiopian thinkers, in one way or another, identified with the Grand Narrative, and sought to achieve *ləmat* entirely within the already-existing confines of the Grand Narrative (chapter 5). Using the words of third-generation writers, as imprecise as they are, one can say that the old intelligentsia did not step out of ‘tradition’, and Western modernity was indeed conceived in a reductionist way exclusively through the lens of that ‘tradition’. Within this general picture, though, there are once again differences between one generation and the next. The first and second generation openly embraced the Grand Narrative in its acoloniality, while the third started questioning some of the Grand Narrative’s key assumptions, including its acoloniality. The process of ‘recolonisation’ of the Grand Narrative (chapter 6), though, remained superficial and limited. The belief that Ethiopia could pursue an ‘acolonial modernity’ remained at the centre of Ethiopian political thought. The conceptual *käšäfa* of Ethiopian intellectuals, then, could be explained on the ground of their unicentric vision of history and cultural otherness. This is closely related to their problematic socio-political relation with the imperial palace. By hailing Haylä Səlasse, Ethiopian intellectuals also supported the Emperor’s assimilationist cultural policies and his view of a homogeneous national identity based on Orthodox-Amharic *habäša* heritage.

Chapter 5 – The acolonial modernity of the Grand Narrative

The first three generations of 20th century intellectuals largely moved within the acoloniality of the Grand Narrative. Alterity was feared and antagonised, and the threat it posed was tackled via cancellation or assimilation. Ethiopia's relation with colonialism was dismissed and suppressed. Power relations were not accounted for, and transcendental conceptions of identity prevailed. Cultural difference was essentialised and constructed based on a rigid 'us vs. them' dichotomy. There were some instances of temporary deviation, and moments in which doubts surfaced about some of the Grand Narrative's main tenets, but the Grand Narrative as a whole was never comprehensively challenged. This chapter outlines the various dimensions of Ethiopia's relation with colonialism and examines how, in the works of pro-*zāmānawinnāt* intellectuals, each of these dimensions was either left unanalysed or represented in a reductionist way. This chapter highlights how concepts like 'angst' and 'anxiety' are used by historians to describe the intellectuals' reaction every time the Grand Narrative's promises were put into discussion. Kane, in his typically scathing tone, observes that there are 'many problems which the Ethiopian author is unwilling to face and treat frankly' (1975: 143). Four different aspects of the Grand Narrative's acoloniality are analysed: the Grand Narrative's internal border and idea of nationhood, the Grand Narrative's external border and sense of continental belonging, and the two momentous encounters with Italian imperialist expansionism – the victory at Adwa and the Italian occupation.

Adwa

Adwa is a cornerstone of the Grand Narrative. The victory gave Ethiopian intellectuals a high degree of cultural confidence, allowing them to confute Western supremacist ideas and to see Ethiopia as equal to Western countries in status and prestige. 'What was Ethiopia like in the eyes of the Europeans before the battle and victory at Adwa?' asks Sahlā-Selasse Bərhanā-Maryam in his *Baša Keṭaw*, 'A country seen with contempt and considered unimportant! It is the victory at Adwa that gave her a proper place in the world's map' (1973: 12). Over the years, the memory of Adwa was reactivated whenever *habäša* exceptionalism and Ethiopian superiority needed to be reaffirmed.

In the years immediately following the battle, the memory of the victory was used to reconfirm the Grand Narrative's ideas of religious chosenness and the God-ordained character of the monarchy. The fact that St. George was thought to have fought alongside the Ethiopian forces rekindled the belief in Ethiopia's covenant with God¹⁸⁵. For the whole of the imperial period the victory of Adwa was commemorated as an Orthodox religious festivity. One year

¹⁸⁵ See for example the way the battle was commemorated on *Addis Zāmān* Vol. 9 No. 45, 28 Yäkatit 1942.

after the victory, Mənilək started the construction of a church dedicated to St. George, to thank the saint for his assistance during the war, and in 1903, in the course of the first public commemoration of the battle, he declared that the victory would be celebrated every year on Yekatit 23, in coincidence with St. George's day in the Orthodox religious calendar (Biniam 2004: 15). The yearly festivity was an occasion to praise the past deeds of Ethiopian monarchs, the country's present rulers and the divine character of the monarchy (Biniam 2004: 18-20).

As the second Italo-Ethiopian war was approaching, the memory of Adwa was again mobilised, but this time to stress other aspects of the Grand Narrative. A central concern of fictional and non-fictional works became the Grand Narrative's belief in a supra-historical Pan-Ethiopian unity. From the point of view of the Grand Narrative, the existence of a shared sense of Ethiopian nationhood had already been demonstrated by the unanimity with which Ethiopian leaders reacted to Mənilək's call to arms. In the imminence of a new Italian invasion, the government's and the intellectuals' patriotic propaganda was centred on the need to rekindle this unity. To contrast the perceived danger of defections, works from the period insisted on presenting Adwa as a 'Pan-Ethiopian victory' or a 'people's victory'. There was clearly a certain degree of apprehension on the part of the ruling elite regarding the allegiance of Tigrayans and Oromo, and the two groups were prominent target of the 'unity campaign'. References to Adwa were present in virtually all works produced by the members of the *YäHagär Fəḵər Mahbär*, including Yoftahe Nəguse and Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs. One of Yoftahe's poems, for example, celebrated the pivotal contribution to the Adwa victory of the Tigrayan Ras Alula and the Šäwan Oromo Ras Gobäna, clearly an admonishment for the Tigrayans and Oromos in Yoftahe's audience:

Let me collect their bones digging the grave
 Gobana from Šäwa, Alula from Təgre
 I have been dreaming since yesterday
 Alula for bullet and Gobäna for trapping
 All came together and swore allegiance
 Alula from Təgray and Gobäna from Galla¹⁸⁶
 Gobäna to train his daughter horse riding
 And Alula to train his daughter firing bullet
 To expand education and to strengthen unity
 Let the four councillors
 Mäkönnən, Därso, Alula, Gobäna
 Let our country get relieved (Amharic original quoted in Mulugeta 1971/72: 48).

¹⁸⁶ This was the Amharic term used to designate the Oromo. It is now considered highly pejorative and no longer in use.

In the post-occupation period, Haylä Səlasse declared Adwa day an official national holiday. The festivity continued to be celebrated within the premises of St. George's cathedral. Themes of religious chosenness and divine favour continued to be central in the celebrations, and the commemoration kept being embedded in Orthodox theology and rituals. Despite this, the yearly celebrations of the Adwa victory were more subdued in tone compared to the pomp and splendour of the other newly-designated national holiday, Victory Day (also called Patriots' Day) on May 5th (Biniam 2004: 33). Haylä Səlasse probably did not want to invite comparisons between Mənilək's quick and relatively easy victory in 1896 and the less honourable five-year struggle under his leadership. Post-1941 intellectual output shows a similar reticence towards the Adwa victory, and works devoted to the battle were few and far between (Biniam 2004: 87-88). The crown controlled and manipulated the way the Adwa victory was remembered, and for the whole of Haylä Səlasse's rule the various commemorations glorified the role played in the battle by *Ras Mäkönnən*, the Emperor's father. The historiography of the imperial period is also understandably nervous when discussing the reasons why Mənilək II did not proceed to liberate Eritrea after the Adwa victory.

Despite these elements of reticence, it is hard to overemphasise the role Adwa maintained in the Grand Narrative. The myths of continuity and survival, of a supra-historical national unity, of God's support for the monarchy, and of Ethiopian exceptionalism were all re-energised by the tales of Adwa. The victory was the most obvious historical referent around which the Grand Narrative's acoloniality was built, and it still occupies a central place in Ethiopianist nationalism. Of all the ways in which Adwa was seen to confirm the Grand Narrative, the one that Ethiopian rulers made most use of is the representation of Adwa as a pan-national victory. Historians and intellectuals appealed to Adwa whenever they needed to shore up the imperial conception of nationhood.

Nationalism and nationhood in the imperial period: Ethiopia's internal border

The first three generations of intellectuals conceived Ethiopianness in an essentially contradictory way, at the same time reinforcing the country's internal border and denying its existence. On the one hand, Ethiopia was presented as a land of social harmony and ethnic inclusiveness, where all people, having always belonged to Ethiopia and having been finally brought back together by Mənilək, shared the same national identity. Ethiopianness, in this interpretation, applies to all of the empire's citizens and beyond, since Eritrea and Somalia were also thought to have been 'Ethiopian' in the past and were represented as longing to be reunited to the 'motherland'. Alterity and cultural difference are, in this view, simply negated. Local particularisms are secondary and minimised as irrelevant when compared to the sense of national brotherhood all citizens, it is argued, have always felt. All citizens feel first and

foremost Ethiopian, and all agree that sub-national group identities are unimportant. Slogans like ‘we are all alike’, ‘we are all Ethiopian in the same way’, and ‘we all feel the same towards our nation’ often recurred, variously phrased, in post-1941 publications. In these cases, cultural difference is simply denied.

However, when Ethiopianness is further unpacked, an hierarchy soon emerges between a ‘true’ Ethiopianness, represented by *habäša* heritage, and a cultural periphery of ‘others’ whose different cultural heritage is perceived with suspicion as dangerously un-Ethiopian and invariably defined as ‘tribal’. As a consequence, ‘those whose cultures have been devalued by Amhara hegemony emphasise the power relations inherent in such a national identity, the necessity to commit cultural suicide, and the inability for non-Amhara to ever fully succeed’ (Sorenson 1993: 69). When alterity cannot be discarded and has to be recognised as such, then it immediately appears as a threat to be dealt with via assimilation or subjugation. Typical of this ambivalence is the way the Oromo are portrayed in Amharic-language historiography. If the author wants to emphasise Ethiopia’s prodigious survival in time against enemy incursions, the Oromo are listed among the foreign foes who invaded the country from the outside, an argument that negates that the Oromo were ever ‘Ethiopian’. If the author wants to make a point about all ethnicities in the countries sharing a sense of Ethiopianness, the Oromo are treated as ‘one of us’ and considered to have always belonged to Ethiopia and to have always participated to the Ethiopian national identity. This system of internal power relations between ‘Ethiopians proper’ and ‘Ethiopians on occasion’ went completely overlooked in the Grand Narrative. No one of the intellectuals analysed in this thesis, as we shall see in the next paragraphs, questioned the transcendental and trans-historical unity upon which the Grand Narrative’s notion of nationhood was predicated.

Pre-1936

One of the earliest documents that forcefully reaffirmed Ethiopia’s internal border in the context of Ethiopia’s new nation-state status was a letter that Tigrayan intellectual Gäbrä-Əgziabher Gila-Maryam sent to Emperor Mənilək in 1899¹⁸⁷. In what Bahru defines as ‘one of the most scathing letters that had ever been addressed to any Ethiopian ruler’ (2002: 156-157), Gäbrä-Əgziabher criticises Mənilək’s decision not to continue his military campaign against the Italians after the victory of Adwa. Mənilək, Gäbrä-Əgziabher accuses, should have advanced with his troops into Eritrea to completely liberate it from the Italian presence. Far from doing this, Mənilək preferred instead to put an end to the war and signed with the Italians a peace treaty in which he legitimised their possession of Eritrea. By doing so, according to Gäbrä-Əgziabher, he abandoned into the grip of the Europeans an integral part of Ethiopian territory –

¹⁸⁷ The letter has been transcribed, translated and extensively analysed by Taddia (1988, 1994a). See also Tekeste Negash (1986).

the *habäša*-inhabited and Tigrinya-speaking highlands situated across the Märäb river, preferring instead to consolidate his control over the Oromo-majority areas in the south of the country. Gäbrä-Əgziabher sees this as treason:

King Teodoros and King Yohannes [...] preserved their mother country with great veneration. But You, Your Majesty, have severed its integral parts completely. [...] Even though Your Majesty had power to do otherwise, You are proceeding to tear to pieces Your Mother Ethiopia's womb. [...] Either because of incapacity or because of stupidity, You are disposing of Ethiopia as a person disposes of his urine (quoted in Bahru 2002: 157).

And then the final blow: 'Call your reign Menelik the Second, King of Kings of Galla and of half of Ethiopia' (quoted in Bahru 2002: 157). Gäbrä-Əgziabher's derision for Mənilək's choice implicitly juxtaposes the 'Galla' (Oromo) and 'Ethiopia', the 'motherland' to which only *habäša* people belong. In Gäbrä-Əgziabher's conception, the Oromo are evidently not Ethiopian. In the years of transition from empire and to modern statehood, Gäbrä-Əgziabher's differentiation between first- and second-class citizens is evident, just like it is evident his resistance to revisit the meaning of Ethiopia's national identity. Ethiopia coincides and will always coincide, in Gäbrä-Əgziabher's view, with Abyssinia.

The history of the brief reign of *Ləjj* Iyasu exemplifies the extent to which Gäbrä-Əgziabher's ideas were entrenched among the Ethiopian elites. Until Iyasu's rise to power in 1910, Ethiopian political thought was dominated by the belief that the Ethiopian state could be viable only if culturally and religiously homogeneous. Access to power was, at the time of Mənilək, limited to Amharic-speaking and Christian elites. If strong regional and cultural diversity was maintained, 19th century Ethiopian rulers feared, the state would risk disintegrating. As a result, policies of forced religious conversions, particularly targeting Muslims, were implemented by successive Ethiopian emperors. Iyasu's father, *Ras* Mikael of Wällo, born Mohammed Ali, was one of these forced converts.

When he came to power, Iyasu was 13 years old, and historical sources agree in describing him as highly intelligent and idealistic, but brash, undisciplined, erratic and impulsive. The young ruler broke quite dramatically with Ethiopia's assimilationist and centralising political culture. His reign was characterised by an unprecedented multicultural and multireligious opening, especially towards Muslims. He sponsored the construction of churches, but also mosques; married into powerful Christian families, but also into powerful Muslim families; and spent a good part of his rule in the eastern lowlands of Ethiopia – Harär in particular. Iyasu had no intention of replacing Orthodox Christianity with Islam, but envisioned the two religions coexisting side by side in the Ethiopian state. He was consciously trying to

redress the past injustices against Muslims, reconciling the two religions and integrating Ethiopia's marginalised peripheries. Even within the core of the Empire, Iyasu pushed for a process of regional decentralisation. One of the young ruler's first moves was elevating his father to the rank of *Nəgus* of Wällo and Təgray. Mikael, now a virtual co-regent, was symbolically crowned with Mənilək's crown, signalling a shift in power from the central region of Šäwa, Mənilək's power base, to the Northern provinces (Smidt 2001). Iyasu's appointment policy further alienated the Šäwan elites. He started assigning Muslims to positions of power in Muslim-majority areas, and initiated a generational change in state structures by promoting young and progressive individuals over the old aristocracy. Discontent started mounting in Šäwa at Iyasu's political and religious decentralisation, and the ruler's hedonism and unruly behaviour further compromised his credibility.

Iyasu's policy of national reconciliation between Christians and Muslims also oriented his foreign policy choices during the First World War. With Ethiopian independence continuously under threat at the hands of the Allies, whose colonies surrounded Ethiopia on all sides, Iyasu started to get closer to the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers. Ahmed Mazhar Bey, the Ottoman envoy in Ethiopia, had a central role in trying to persuade Iyasu to side with the Ottomans. Iyasu, on his side, thought that the alliance with Istanbul could form an anti-colonial front in the Horn. The young ruler, Smidt argues, 'was preparing an ambitious inter-alliance with Muslim groups and regions far beyond Ethiopia, aiming at a great Christian-Muslim entity unifying the Horn of Africa (under Ethiopian leadership), and thus radically defying colonial interests in the region' (Smidt 2014: 200). From here came Iyasu's decision to lend ideological and military support to the guerrilla movement of *Sayyid* Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, the Somali leader who since 1899 had been fighting an anti-colonial jihad against British expansionism in Northern Somalia. If Smidt's assessment is true, Iyasu's foreign policy was possibly even more radical than his domestic policy. Rather than appeasing Western powers or trying to compromise with them as it had been customary for Ethiopian leaders, Iyasu was for the first time envisioning Ethiopia as part of an anti-colonial political front. Iyasu's support for the *Sayyid* against the British marked a drastic change from previous political approaches, considering both the history of mutual hostilities between the Solomonic polity and Islamic Somali states and the way Britain had always been courted as an ally by previous Ethiopian rulers.

The pressures of the First World War eventually proved Iyasu's undoing. Worried about the young ruler's pro-Ottoman leanings, the Allies lent credibility to the already-existing rumours that Iyasu had converted to Islam by fabricating fake photographic and documentary evidence. The already-bitter Šäwan elites seized the chance to concretise their earlier plans to remove Iyasu. On the 27th of September, while the young ruler was on one of his usual tours in the east of the country, a coup removed him from power in Addis Abäba. *Abunä* Matewos, the

Head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, was pressured into excommunicating Iyasu on the grounds of his alleged apostasy. Iyasu went into hiding, and his father Mikael marched down towards Addis to restore his son to the throne. In the final battle at Səgäle (27 October 1916), Mikael's 80,000-strong army was defeated by 120,000 Šāwan troops. Iyasu's right to rule was conclusively invalidated, and the Christian and Šāwan character of the Ethiopian monarchy forcefully reaffirmed.

Whether his actions were the result of rationally-planned policies or of instinctive personal inclinations, Iyasu was advocating a loosening of Ethiopia's internal border and a nuancing of Amhara linguistic and religious supremacy. Iyasu's opening towards Islam was certainly one of the main reasons for the coup against him (Smidt 2009). Among the accusations levelled against Iyasu, the religious dimension retains a prominent place¹⁸⁸. 'He claims that he eats flesh of cattle slain by Muslims in order to extend frontiers and to win hearts', wrote Mahtämä-Səllase Wäldä-Mäskäl¹⁸⁹, 'but these Somali and Muslims have already been brought to heel [and do not need such diplomacy]' (quoted in Bahru 1991: 127). Somalis and Muslims are presented by Mahtämä-Səllase, in accordance with the typical Grand Narrative pattern, as an intrinsically-antagonistic and threatening 'other' to be disciplined and subjugated, with whom a dialogue is unnecessary if not impossible. The historiography produced under Haylä Səllase, subordinated as it was to the Emperor's own political agenda, tended to portray Iyasu's reign as negatively as possible or to dismiss its importance (Rubinowska 2004: 224-226). Only recently historians have started contesting this *damnatio memoriae*, underlining instead how creative and ground-breaking some of Iyasu's choices were (Smidt 2014). His domestic and foreign policy openly defied the Grand Narrative's acoloniality. It is important, though, not to fall in the opposite trap of idealising Iyasu as a 'martyr of multiculturalism'. His vain and inconsistent behaviour made him an unreliable ruler, and was probably an equally significant factor in the intellectuals' shift of alliances to Täfäri.

That Gäbrä-Həywät Baykädañ did not agree with Iyasu's opening towards non-*habäša* traditions is evident from some passages of his *Mängəstənnä YäHəzb Astädadär* ('Government and public administration'). In more than one way, Gäbrä-Həywät significantly challenged

¹⁸⁸ Despite the prominence of religious and ethnic dynamics in Iyasu's downfall, a merely ethnic-based (Amhara vs. non-Amhara) or religious-based (Christians vs. Muslims) interpretation of the coup is insufficient. The fact that at Səgäle the two opposing armies were led by Oromo leaders (*Nəgus* Mikael was of Oromo origin just like the commander of Šāwa's army, *Fitawrari* Habtä-Giyorgis) immediately complicates an ethnic reading of the conflict. Iyasu's decentralisation meant a shift of power away from Šāwa, with his father's northern power base of Wällo becoming a threat to Šāwan hegemony. Interregional political competition had always been a constant in the history of the Abyssinian polity, and it is within this framework that the coup could be better understood.

¹⁸⁹ *Blatten Geta* Mahtämä-Səllase Wäldä-Mäskäl (1904-1978), a Mənilək II school graduate and later French-educated, was governor of Ambo and senior aid to the Crown Prince before the Italian occupation. After the liberation, he started working on a voluminous (985 pages long) compilation of documents, *Zəkrä Nəgär* ('Memorable things', 1969/70). He held various ministerial positions, rising to become Crown Councillor in 1966. He was incarcerated following the 1974 revolution and died in prison.

some of the Grand Narrative's methodologies, for example by advocating a secularisation of Ethiopia's political space and freedom of religion for all Ethiopia's citizens (1912: 353-54). He nevertheless repeats the nationalist slogan that 'the land which was recently conquered by Mənilək was in the ancient times developed by Ethiopians' (1995: 77), thus supporting the thesis of Mənilək's 'restoration' of Ethiopia's ancient territorial identity. This passage also proposes a restricted notion of Ethiopianness as coinciding with *habäša* heritage only. Gäbrä-Həywät 'does not appear to consider as Ethiopians the people who inhabited the area when their political interactions with the Ethiopians of GHB's [Gäbrä-Həywät Baykädañ's] definition [i.e. the *habäša*] were weak, non-existent or interrupted' (Tenkir 1995: 38). He also reiterates the Grand Narrative's belief in the superiority of *habäša* culture by condescendingly claiming that 'the level of the knowledge of the Oromo was low, they had not learned to farm and [they] resorted to marshes and forest' (1995: 77). Tenkir Bongor, who is otherwise very admiring of Gäbrä-Həywät's perspective, admits nonetheless that a major limitation of *Mängəstənnä YəHəzb Astädadär* is that

The radical nationalism displayed by GHB in most of this book does not transcend the chauvinism of most official writers of Ethiopian history. [...] Rather than analysing the formation, non-formation or oscillation of the Ethiopian state in terms of multidirectional warlordism/expansionism – from north to south, west to east, highland to lowland, Christianity or Islam and vice versa – his otherwise most creative chapter lapses into an unnecessary historical diatribe rationalising the position of the Christian Empire (Tenkir 1995: 38).

Gäbrä-Həywät ultimately fails to appreciate Oromo culture, Tenkir argues, due to either

ignorance or his notion of Northern Ethiopian supremacy. [...] By belittling the then semi-nomadic mode of life of the Oromos of this period, GHB is mistakenly expressing a hierarchical and stage model of development towards sedentarization (Tenkir 1995: 229).

Gäbrä-Həywät's thought is, in this respect, representative of the teleological vision of progress common to most pro-*zämänawinnät* elites. In his already-cited 1925 speech at the opening of the Täfäri Mäkönnən School, Wərḳəñäh Əšäte 'asserted that the subjugation of the Oromo, Wälayta and other southern people by the north was proof to him of a universal law that the more developed are bound to dominate the less developed' (Bahru 2002: 139). This was for Wərḳəñäh a 'universal law'. Modernisation theory was here used to legitimise *habäša* cultural superiority and *habäša* rule over non-*habäša* citizens, in ways not entirely dissimilar from the way the same theory was used in Europe to legitimise European colonialism.

Afäwärk Gäbrä-Iyyäsus's 1908 *Ləbb Wälläd Tarik* clearly alludes to Mənilək's imperial expansion, which, in the novel's allegory, is credited with bringing 'light', Christianity and civilisation to infidels¹⁹⁰. In the novel, Ethiopia is allegorically represented by the Christian female protagonist Țobbya (Taye 1995: 86). Towards the end of the book, a rival pagan king offers to marry her, but she categorically refuses an inter-faith marriage. Marrying a non-Christian would mean, according to her, committing a sin against God and renouncing the eternal joys of heaven (Taye 1995: 71). The solution for Țobbya, and therefore for Ethiopia, is cultural assimilationism: the pagan king accepts to convert to Christianity in order to marry Țobbya. The marriage finally puts an end to the long history of wars between the Christian and the pagan kingdom, inaugurating a period of *pax Christiana*. Although there are exceptions, the magnanimous pagan king being the most evident, Afäwärk's novel 'is populated mainly by two categories of characters: the virtuous (who are essentially the Christians) and the wicked (who are essentially the non-Christians)' (Taye 1995: 83). In the novel's happy ending, 'the ideal state to be forged as a result of [Țobbya and the pagan king's] marriage cannot, given its bias, be anything but the 'virtuous' Christian state that the Ethiopia of the myths has for centuries been viewed to be' (Yonas 1995a: 109). *Ləbb Wälläd Tarik* ultimately tells the story of 'an abstracted Ethiopia whose very survival is threatened by religious conflict and which ultimately attains salvation and glory through the consolidation of Christian hegemony' (Taye 1995: 77). The novel symbolically alludes to Ethiopia's evangelising and pacifying mission, as narrated in *Kəbrä Nəgəst*. Although not explicitly mentioned, Ahmäd Grañ's invasion (at the beginning of the novel, the pagan kingdom has almost completely wiped out the Christian one) and Mənilək's conquest and 'pacification' of the lowlands (inhabited mostly by non-Christians) are constitutive elements in Afäwärk's inspiration.

Iyasu's 'new policy of integrating the extremely diverging peoples of Ethiopia into the state' was 'radically revised by his de-facto-successor ras Täfäri, and to be almost forgotten later' (Smidt 2001: 369). Iyasu's political prioritisation of issues of religious and cultural co-existence in the country stands in contrast with the lack of importance his successor attributed to the same matters. In the 1920s, *Ras* Täfäri and the ruling elite 'seemed much more intent on gaining the means to preserve their hold on power and defend their territory than in promoting programs that would meld Ethiopia's peoples into a single nation' (McClellan 1996: 59). Even after Täfäri was crowned Emperor, his position on nation-building was not clearly defined:

He made only vague reference to it in his public writings and utterances. To a considerable degree his view was the older Abyssinian one, i.e. that Ethiopia was Abyssinia writ larger. The nation did not need to be built; it simply existed. He certainly

¹⁹⁰ Depending on how the term *arāmāne* ('unbeliever, barbarian, savage') is translated, these infidels have been interpreted to be pagans or Muslims. Taya convincingly argues that 'there are many evidences in the text which suggest these people are Muslims' (1995: 90), but critics generally regard them as pagans.

was cognizant of the multi-ethnic nature of his state, but like Menilek before him, believed that assimilation, over time, would solve the ethnic ‘problem’ (McClellan 1996: 80)¹⁹¹.

This long term approach is evident in an article entitled ‘Unity’ published in the 28 December 1933 issue of *Bərhanənnā Sālam*¹⁹². The article well exemplifies the primacy attributed to language in the way nation-building was envisioned. Once a single language is imposed throughout the state, the author suggests, the nation will automatically come into being through the spontaneous assimilation of different ethnic groups. Sharing a language will lead Ethiopians to greater mutual understanding and will facilitate intermarriage:

The plans of the Ethiopian Government are plain. It likes to have all the people of the country speak Amharic. With language unity there is also a unity of ideas. Thus by intermarriage their lives are united and they cannot separate, but their sympathies increase. [...] With such a foundation of mutual sympathy our country will remain united without orders from anyone (*BS* 28/12/1933)¹⁹³.

The article goes on to criticise missionaries who used languages other than Amharic in their mission stations around the country. This represented, according to the writer, an obstacle for national unity. That the domination of Amharic might alienate other ethnic groups ‘was ignored by many nationalists, especially by the Young Ethiopians, who stared fixedly at a vision of a modern nation gleaned from Western textbooks’ (Marcus 1987: 131). Preserving national unity meant essentially to preserve Amhara cultural and political control and to mould all imperial subjects in the image of their rulers. Unity was thought to be achievable only through sameness and homogeneity. Alongside language, religion was also at the centre of the educated elites’ nation-building programme, as emphasised for example in this memo circulated in 1933 by the Minister of Education, Sahle Šādalū¹⁹⁴:

The strength of a country lies in its unity, and unity is born of common language, customs and religion. Thus, to safeguard the ancient sovereignty of Ethiopia and to reinforce its unity, our language and our religion should be proclaimed over the whole

¹⁹¹ Markakis (1989) advances the same argument.

¹⁹² The article is quoted in Marcus (1987: 137) and McClellan (1996: 81).

¹⁹³ The idea of achieving unity via intermarriage was a rather original proposal on the part of the writer; the government, both before and after the Italian occupation, never made it an explicit policy to promote intermarriages. However, it seems that there is a class dimension to the article’s suggestion, and that the author was envisioning intermarriage as a practice to be encouraged among the lower classes, but from which the elites were conveniently excluded.

¹⁹⁴ Sahle Šādalū (1887-1971), church educated and later a Mənilək II School graduate, had a high-profile career as diplomat, translator and politicians in various Ministries. He was appointed Director General of the Ministry of Education in 1928/29 with the task of reorganising and modernising the institution. He was promoted to Minister of Education in 1932.

of Ethiopia. Otherwise, unity will never be attained. Amharic and Ge'ez should be decreed official languages for secular as well as religious affairs and all pagan languages should be banned (quoted in Bahru 2002: 140).

Compared to the *Bərhanənnā Sālam* article above, Sahle Šādalū is envisioning here a more direct government intervention to create the desired national unity. While the author of the *Bərhanənnā Sālam* article expected unity to automatically happen once the right circumstances were in place, Sahle Šādalū strongly advocates instead a proactive policy-making on the part of the state.

Another proponent of cultural and religious assimilationism was Tādla Haile. His MA dissertation at the University of Antwerp¹⁹⁵ had the programmatic title *Purquoi et comment pratiquer une politique d'assimilation en Ethiopie* ('Why and how to practice a policy of assimilation in Ethiopia'). From the title it is clear that Tādla considers Ethiopia's multicultural make-up as a problem to be resolutely and urgently faced with a comprehensive set of policy measures. From Tādla's point of view, the only two ethnic groups that play a relevant role in the country are the Amhara and the Oromo. For Ethiopia to prosper, the two need to have a harmonious relationship. But how was the 'Gallo-Amhara problem', so he terms it, to be solved? In an interesting *ante litteram* refutation of the colonial thesis that would develop in Ethiopian historiography forty years later (see chapter 6), Tādla is careful to point out that the relationship between the Amhara and the Oromo was different from that between European rulers and their colonial subjects. Amharas and Oromos had lived side by side for many centuries, had a comparable way of life, shared analogous interests and their racial appearance was also similar. Despite these similarities, though, Tādla makes it clear that the Amhara are the 'dominant' and 'governing' race (1930: 8).

Starting from this premise, he analyses three possible solutions with regard to the Oromo: enslavement and expropriation, assimilation and indirect rule (Bahru 2002: 132). He rules out the first as morally unacceptable, and the third one as impractical in the Ethiopian context. Indirect rule only worked for European colonies in Africa and Asia, where the population was too numerous to be assimilated and where the rulers and the ruled were racially different and had very different needs and interests (1930: 32-33). The best option for Ethiopia is thus the second. In order to forge 'a modernised Ethiopia not divided by differences of race' (1930: 31), the Amhara and the Oromo would have to 'fuse' into a single race. Again, *lāmat* was achievable for Ethiopia only by creating sameness. Assimilation had already been successful in the past, and Oromos like *Ras Gobāna*, *Fitawrari* Habtā Giyorgis, and *Dājazmač* Balča, had already proved to be such 'good Ethiopians' (1930: 34-35). Given their lack of 'racial pride' and their willingness to intermarry, the Oromos are easy to assimilate, and

¹⁹⁵ For a detailed summary and analysis of this work, see Pankhurst 1998.

therefore it was up to them to change their identity and become Amharised. In a now infamous passage, quoted by many Oromo historians as evidence of Amhara chauvinism, Tädla concludes that ‘it is for the Galla to become Amhara and not the other way round, for the latter possess a written language, a superior religion and superior customs and mores’ (quoted in Bahru 2002: 132).

Although Tädla envisioned assimilation to be entirely ‘voluntary’ (1930: 46), he suggests a series of substantial reforms to make it a reality. The Orthodox Church, the army, the school and law courts are all institutions where Oromos would be able to learn Amharic and Amhara customs, and where Amharas and Oromos would be imbued by a shared sense of patriotism (1930: 39-40, 61-62). Language policy occupies a major part of Tädla’s proposed solution, to the point that he makes the knowledge of Amharic a necessary prerequisite for Ethiopian citizenship (1930: 46). Teaching in any language besides Amharic should be outlawed (1930: 72). Even more controversially, Tädla argues in favour of a larger-scale settling of Amharas in Oromo territories, claiming that Amhara soldiers should be given free land grants in Oromo-inhabited areas. Parallel to this, a more decisive evangelising effort should be undertaken by the Orthodox Church in Oromo lands, and special honours awarded to all those teaching Amharic and Christianity to the Oromo.

Pankhurst claims that there is ‘every reason to suppose that [Tädla’s dissertation] must also have been read by the then Ethiopian monarch, for the international support of whom its author had so emphatically appealed’ (1998: 93). However, he adds, ‘there is no evidence that any of his detailed proposals were ever seriously considered in government circles, let alone implemented’ (1998: 94). Contrary to Pankhurst’s assessment, the next paragraph argues that Tädla’s proposal certainly contributed to shaping the ideological backdrop that informed Haylä Səlasse’s more forceful and systematic assimilationist policies in the post-liberation period.

Post-1941

Just like Tädla had envisaged, the institutionalisation of Amharic as state language in the post-liberation period was supported by educational and military reforms. Amharic became primary language of instruction and *lingua franca* for the soldiers drafted from various parts of the country in the now-centralised army controlled directly by the central government. The 1955 constitution formally declared Amharic Ethiopia’s national language. Knowledge of Amharic became a requirement for foreigners who sought naturalisation (Bahru 2008: 86). New regulations in 1944 made it compulsory for missionaries to learn Amharic and to use it as the only language of instruction in mission schools. In violation of the Ethio-Eritrean federal agreement, Amharic was imposed as Eritrea’s official language in the early 1960s, replacing Tigrinya and Arabic. Islam was marginalised and considered a second-class religion, with

restrictions in place (on political participation, celebration of religious holidays, religious education) that were only gradually lifted towards the end of Haylä Səlasse's reign (Abbink 1998: 116).

Haylä Səlasse's policy of promoting Amharic and Orthodox Christianity surely had an ethnic, pro-Amhara component, but this Amhara-centrism should be understood more in terms of regionalist policy than sheer ethnic chauvinism. Both Clapham (1969: 75-77) and Crummey (2003) have argued that it was not so much Amhara-centrism, but more precisely Šäwa-centrism, that was really at the core of Haylä Səlasse's ruling strategies:

To characterize the regime crudely, as many have done, as being one of Amhara domination is inadequate. Šäwan domination would be nearer the truth, since the regime's payoffs did not go to the Amhara in any real sense but rather to the class or classes that clustered around the state and to some of the people who lived in the province of Šäwa, most particularly, in the Addis Ababa-Nazreth corridor. Most of the Amhara, the farming populations of Gojjam, of Bägémder, of parts of Wällo, and even of northern Šäwa, received few favors from Addis Ababa. While they were treated more gently than other people in Ethiopia, they benefited much less from the regime than did Šäwa or western Wälläga, and, down to 1974, had poorer access to modern education or medicine, on a per capita basis, than did the population of Eritrea (Crummey 2003: 128).

Official policy of the regime was to suppress any reference to ethnic identities. By the time the Haylä Səlasse I University opened in 1961, it was 'illegal to ask a person's ethnic origin' (Balsvik 1985: 43). Writing in 1974, Markakis reports that 'the Ethiopian government avoids any reference to ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, and [...] actively discourages non-official inquiry in this field. (Markakis 1974: 51)¹⁹⁶.

Pro-*zämänawinnät* intellectuals seem to have almost unanimously stood behind Haylä Səlasse's policies, and conceived assimilationism as a necessary step towards Ethiopian nation-building. *Habäša* heritage was 'national', while other cultural traditions were seen to represent 'tribalist' or 'sectionalist' viewpoints. This hierarchical nationhood was based on a clear power relation between cultures that, by nature and birth right, were 'Ethiopian', and cultures that, by nature and birth right, were 'un-Ethiopian'. The latter were completely excluded from dominant

¹⁹⁶ The government had always discouraged anthropological research into Ethiopia's different ethnicities, fearing this would consolidate 'tribal' identities. Back in the 1930s, when British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard expressed his intention to study the culture of the Oromo living in the province of Illubabor, he received written guidelines from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on how to remain within the imperial representational mode. Mäkonnen Əndalkačäw, then governor of Illubabor, made the point clear by writing to the British Foreign Office that 'in Addis Ababa there is a book of customs, habits and language of the Galla people, so [Evans-Pritchard] can come to Addis Ababa to buy this book' (quoted in Zitelmann 2001: 162).

ideas of nationhood. The fact that the kind of nationhood envisioned by the ruling elite was not an egalitarian synthesis of all Ethiopian cultural traditions, but a forceful extension of *one* culture onto others never encountered substantial objections on the part of the old intelligentsia. Censorship conditioned this apparent consensus, but even after the downfall of Haylä Səlasse pro-*zāmānawinnāt* authors held onto the same views. Even nowadays, these ideas are still widespread. The historians who praise the old intelligentsia's ability to hybridise 'tradition' and 'modernity' are also invariably influenced by a *habäša*-centric view, as the 'tradition' that their intellectual heroes were combining with Western modernity is the highland *habäša* culture. The synthesis that older intellectuals allegedly operated was made from a dominant and elite socio-cultural location.

Interviewed by Molvaer in the 1980s, Daññaččäw Wärku, speaking from the position of power of the Amharic-speaking Western-educated elite, says that to him 'tribes do not matter', explaining that 'we are together in this country, and being together we have our differences, and yet what guarantees our survival is the values that we have accumulated through generations' (Molvaer 1997a: 298). His character Adäfrəs voices a similar position, stating with confidence that 'although various languages are spoken in Ethiopia, there are not many racial and cultural differences' (1969/70 160). The ambivalence of Daññaččäw's self-proclaimed open-mindedness emerges in his *Adäfrəs* too. An Orthodox priest called *Abba* Yohannəs is raising funds for the building of a new school, and in order to receive donations he appeals to the unity of all ethnic groups and creeds: 'And so then, give help, all of you according to your ability, to this school, where our unity is strengthened, where Amhara, Galla, Adal and Muslim children are taught' (1969/70: 84, quoted in Molvaer 2008: 83). Yet, his ideas on what tradition is really at the core of Ethiopianness are unequivocal: 'if the country rejects Christianity [lit. 'snaps her Christian neck-cord'], if the faith of the people weakens, the fall of both the country and the people will not be a nice sight' (1969/70: 80, quoted in Molvaer 2008: 83-84).

Those thinkers that attempted to revise the unicentrality of state nationalism were quickly marginalised, or faced a series of often insurmountable obstacles. Yəlma Däressa's 1967 study of 16th century Ethiopia¹⁹⁷ caused many high-profile politicians to demand the removal of Yəlma from his position of Minister of Finance. Yəlma, who was descendent of a high-profile Oromo dynasty from Wälläga, was allegedly accused to give too much space in his book to the Oromo invasion and to overestimate its impact (Paulos 2014: 47). Another Oromo from Wälläga, Emmanuel Abraham, was removed from his post as Minister of Education in

¹⁹⁷ Titled *YäItiyopya Tarik BäAsra Səddəstāñña Kaflä Zāmān* ('Ethiopian history of the 16th century').

1947¹⁹⁸ because his educational policies were perceived to unacceptably favour the Oromo and to illicitly promote the use of the Oromo language (Zitelmann 2001: 170-171). Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam, who was a mother tongue Gurage speaker, complained to Molvaer that he had to give up writing in Gurage because, even if the number of Gurage speakers in Ethiopia could have sustained a market of Gurage-language literary products, the fact that only Amharic was used as a language of instruction quashed this possibility (Molvaer 1997a: 372). On top of this, even if he had wanted to publish in Gurage for the few people who were literate in the language, the censors would have never approved the publication. Amharic always remained for Sahlä-Səlasse a second language, and his Amharic-language novels were often denied publication because their Amharic was judged not fluent enough. Due to these experiences, Sahlä-Səlasse was never completely at ease with the Amharic language. This comprehensible frustration later led him to campaign for a more substantial use of the ethnically-neutral English in Ethiopian literature, a position he defended against both Asfaw Damtē's belief that Ethiopian literature should only encompass works written in Ethiopian languages, and against Mängəstu Lämman's identification of Ethiopian literature with the Amharic tradition¹⁹⁹.

The impact of the policies of cultural assimilationism is striking in those few Amharic-language works produced by writers of Muslim origin. Kane (1974) analyses three of these works, all published in the 1960s: Mähamäd Usman's *Gwade Əngadih Amačəh Nänn* ('My pal, now I'm your brother-in-law', 1966/67); Sayəd Abəgaz's *YäMäkabru Təl* ('Worm of the grave', 1967/68); and Abdul-bari' Mähamäd's *Angät Yallaw Yəfräd* ('Let him with sense judge', 1969/70). Generally, these authors had some form of state education, whose essentially secular nature did not constitute an obstacle for their religious identity. Little is known of the three authors, and not much information exists about the three novels. It is safe to assume that the choice of publishing in Amharic was, for authors of Muslim origin, significant, for at least two reasons. Firstly, there was a long tradition of written literature in Arabic they could draw from and contribute to. Not all Ethiopian Muslims spoke Arabic of course, and it is unknown whether these three authors did, but the knowledge of Arabic was nevertheless fairly widespread among educated Muslims. Secondly, although the government kept promoting Amharic among Muslims, the attitude towards Arabic-language publishing became more relaxed after the Italian occupation. The public recognition that Islam and Muslims had acquired under Italian rule made it both risky and impossible for Haylä Səlasse to push them back outside of the public sphere. 'Despite continuing marginalisation', Gori notices, 'Muslims slowly acquired the right to

¹⁹⁸ A mission-educated Protestant, Emmanuel had replaced Mäkonnen Dästa (about whom more below) as Minister of Education in 1944. In a 1941 article for *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Emmanuel described himself as 'an Ethiopian of the Galla race'. In 1995, he published an English-language memoir titled *Reminiscences of My Life*. He claims that his dismissal as Minister of Education was based on the accusation that 'Amanuel educates only the Galla' (Emmanuel 1995: 64).

¹⁹⁹ The debate between the three intellectuals took place in a series of articles published on the magazine *Yekatit* between June 1981 and June 1983 (see Kurtz 2007).

publish, diffuse, buy and sell their books' (2015: 70). Following this cautious liberalisation, Arabic-language printing presses became available to Muslim writers starting from the immediate post-1941 period²⁰⁰. At the same time, though, the government feared that Arabic could become a possible unifying factor of the Muslim population against the state, and Muslims became primary targets of the policy of Amharisation. The emergence of an Amharic literature by Muslim writers is a measure of the success of the Emperor's policy, even more so as the three writers adopt (or were forced to adopt) common themes and modes of the Grand Narrative.

The three novels all repeat the canonical motifs and themes of Amharic literature: the young intellectual coming back from his studies abroad full of ideas on how to reform the country; the importance of education; the tormented love story of two youths who have to struggle against their parents' opposition; the fortuitous encounter of the main character with some long-thought-lost family member; the conservative aristocratic landowner that thwarts the protagonist's reform plan; the plight of the peasants; the moral condemnation of greed. The three authors 'write like their Christian counterparts and on subjects that their Christian fellow authors have dealt with' (Kane 1974: 725). Echoes from Haddis Alämayähu's *Fəḳər Əskä Mäḳabər* and Abbe Gubäñña's *Alwällädəm* are evident in the three novels. References to Islam are minimal, and sometimes the religious identity of the character is rather dubious – at any rate, no noticeable cultural differences are mentioned between Muslim and Christian characters. This fact demonstrates the strength of the Amharic literary canon, but also its rigidity and normativity. There were no spaces, inside this canon, to represent different religions and ethnic traditions, to depict protagonists that were culturally (and perhaps ideologically) different from the typical Amhara-Christian protagonist of all Amharic novels, or to discuss nationhood from a perspective that was possibly different from the Amhara-Christian one.

Pro-zämānawinnät intellectuals were unanimous in upholding the Grand Narrative's idea of nationhood. Writers as different as Mäkonñnən Əndalkaçäw, the most aristocratic and religious member of the second generation, and Abbe Gubäñña, among the most socialist-leaning member of the third generation, thought about Ethiopianness in identical ways. It is revealing, for instance, to compare Mäkonñnən's Amharic-language play *YäDäm Dəms* ('The voice of blood', 1954/55) with Abbe's English-language novel *Defiance*, written 20 years later in the years leading up to the Revolution (and published in 1975)²⁰¹. Both works treat the theme of the Italian occupation. Towards the end of *YäDäm Dəms*, a group of Ethiopians mourn the

²⁰⁰ In this they had a different position from Oromo authors, who, since Oromo did not have a particularly developed written tradition (or even linguistic standardisation) and was not spoken outside of Ethiopia, did not have much choice but write in Amharic if they wanted their works to be published.

²⁰¹ As we shall see further down in the chapter, the theme of unity acquires central importance in fictional and non-fictional works treating the theme of the Italian occupation.

death of *Abuna Petros*, each declaring that the *Abuna*'s execution at the hands of the Italian has convinced him to join the resistance. The scene is a perfect fictionalisation of the Grand Narrative's centre-periphery dynamic. The first character to speak is a *Šäwan*, at the top of Ethiopia's regional power hierarchy. Sure enough, he appeals to unity: 'the pure blood of this saint which flowed over our soil can not fail to bind together in unity [*andännät*] the whole people of Ethiopia' (Mäkönnən 1954/55: 100). The second character is from *Təgray*, the region of Aksum where the Ark of the Covenant is located according to the Orthodox Church, and therefore another symbolic centre of Ethiopianness. The third character is from *Gojjam*, the fourth from *Begemdir*: Mäkönnən is gradually moving from the centre to the peripheries of Ethiopianness. The descending hierarchy becomes apparent when the fifth character appears on the scene, an Oromo. Mäkönnən makes the point that even Oromos were sad about the death of the *Abuna*, thus showing a perfectly harmonious Ethiopia where all groups share the same devotion towards the nation. The Oromo character duly decries the death of *Petros* and is portrayed as the perfect citizen. Docile and obedient, he is grateful to the *Šäwan* elites who raised him and 'civilised' him: 'today I thank the government of *Šäwa* which brought me up, planting me and tending me in the Christian faith and way of life' (Mäkönnən 1954/55: 101). At the very periphery of Ethiopianness, last character to appear in the scene, is a Muslim woman, who evidently represents the most radical kind of alterity Mäkönnən could come up with. Quite telling is the fact that the other characters' first reaction at her arrival is alarm. Being a Muslim and a woman, she is immediately feared to be an enemy. She is different, and represents a threatening 'other'. Comfortingly, though, she is there, like the Oromo man, to plead alliance to the Ethiopian government and to renounce her identity: 'ever since I saw the death of *Abuna Petros* this morning he made me hate being a Muslim' (Mäkönnən 1954/55: 102). The Oromo man and the Muslim woman are perfectly assimilated, and join in the calls for unity. Their cultural and religious difference, which looked menacing at first, is promptly erased via assimilation. It is only after they have given up their own identity and their own 'otherness' that they are not anymore seen as enemies. At the same time Mäkönnən is clear about their peripheral status: they are 'us', in a way, but at the same time clearly not 'us' and inferior to 'us', the same ambivalence on which the imperial conception of nationhood rested. Mäkönnən's play usefully exemplifies another common practice of Amharic literature, that of tokenism. A token Muslim or a token Oromo are present in most literary works, generally to voice support for the Ethiopian government and to underline the unity of purpose of all Ethiopians regardless of their ethnicity, gender or religion.

Defiance tells the story of an old *Fitawrari* and his family during the years of the Italian occupation. A moving moment in the plot is when the *Fitawrari* gets thrown in jail by the Italian authorities. The prison cell is completely dark and crowded with characters representing a microcosm of Ethiopia:

The large dark dungeon was constantly stuffed with every sort of person. Among that unfortunate crowd of suspects was a woman with a sick infant in her arms; Didu, a middle-aged man from Selalie with his eighteen-year-old son Tura; an Eritrean patriot; a hermit; a *debtera*; a sheikh, and many others (Abbe 1975: 74).

The narrator immediately spells out for the reader the theme of unity: ‘Muslim, Christians, pagans, women, children, men strong and weak alike, priests, monks, all in an earthly hell’ (Abbe 1975: 76). The *Fitawrari* becomes close to the sheikh, who has only good words about the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the country: ‘in the good old days, the Ethiopians, both Christians and Muslims alike were the most religious, Allah-fearing people in the world’ (Abbe 1975: 77). In the words of the sheikh, then, Christians and Muslims are both equally ‘Ethiopian’. The *Fitawrari*’s perspective, though, is clearly different. After many days, the prisoners are allowed to briefly exit outside of the prison building, and in the open air the *Fitawrari* can finally see how his cell mates look like. He is shocked at the appearance of the sheikh. While in the dark of the cell, the *Fitawrari* had imagined the sheikh as a ‘cultural other’, different from himself. He had given him, for example, a ‘turbanned head’ (Abbe 1975: 79). But in the open air, contrary to the *Fitawrari*’s expectations, the sheikh reveals himself to be ‘Ethiopian’: ‘He didn’t wear a turban; he was dressed in full Ethiopian costume’ (Abbe 1975: 79). By ‘full Ethiopian costume’ Abbe means the *habäša* dress. Ethiopianness is again equated with *habäša* heritage. The turban wore by Muslims is, from the point of view of the *Fitawrari*, clearly not ‘Ethiopian’. To the *Fitawrari*’s relief, the sheikh is no ‘other’. He has reassuringly assimilated to *habäša* customs, and is therefore exactly like the *Fitawrari*. As in Mäkonnen’s *YäDäm Däms*, the cell is full of token representatives of various cultural and social groups, a plot device used by the narrator to show the feelings of unity and the solidarity governing inter-ethnic and inter-religious interactions. *Defiance* was published in English for Oxford University Press, and therefore Abbe was free of the constraints of Ethiopian censorship. And yet, like in Mäkonnen’s *YäDäm Däms*, in *Defiance* alterity is once again erased.

The Ethiopian government’s political claims over Eritrea and Somalia were faithfully supported by many Ethiopian writers. Peace cannot be restored in Ethiopia, Käbbädä Mikael argued in 1948/49, until the provinces that Italy snatched away from the Empire, Eritrea and Somalia, are finally returned to their legitimate owner, Haylä Səlasse (Käbbädä 1948/49: 105-106). Ethiopian writers celebrated Haylä Səlasse’s 1962 annexation of Eritrea with jubilation, often comparing Eritrea to a child finally reunited to her Mother Ethiopia²⁰², and wrote in support of Ethiopia’s war against Somalia in 1964 (Vaughan 2003: 133). The dream of an Ethiopia as big as a whole Horn of Africa had quite a powerful appeal, and traditional paintings

²⁰² The federation with Eritrea in 1952 was celebrated with a similar rhetoric. An example is Əšäte Daməsse’s play *Ertra Kuri, Ədme Lätäfäri* (‘Be proud Eritrea, long live Täfäri’ 1953/54), whose theme is that of a ‘happy reunion after years of tribulation and separation’ (Kane 1975: 180).

of Mother Ethiopia started taking up more precise geographical contours, situating Mother Ethiopia over a map of North-eastern Africa, her vest covering the whole of the Horn²⁰³. In these paintings, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti were all claimed to belong to Ethiopia's motherly body. Such idea of nationhood was so hegemonic that even those who openly challenged Haylä Səlassə's regime did not put it into question. When describing the 1960 coup, Clapham observes that in their quest for support and legitimacy the coup makers chose, either consciously or instinctively, not to exploit existing ethnic, religious or regionalist fractures. In the documents they produced before the coup was crushed, they declared to be acting on behalf of all Ethiopians, thus mobilising the same idea of Ethiopianness of Haylä Səlassə's regime:

No concessions were made to ethnic particularism or to the regional groupings in the heterogeneous empire. The rebels, like those whom they sought to overthrow, were led by men from the central province of Shoa and did not question the basis of national unity (Clapham 1968: 504).

Even among the fourth generation of Ethiopian intellectuals, the myth of national unity was so strong that the 'national question' emerged late in the history of the student movement (Vaughan 2003: 133). Among the students, according to Kiflu Taddesse, 'the nationality issue was a taboo subject, and even after years of fighting in Eritrea and elsewhere, was not part of public discourse' (Kiflu 1993: 52). Kiflu argues that, well up until 1967,

student writing extolled Ethiopian nationalism, a sentiment perceived to transcend all other identities and loyalties. [...] The Abyssinian nature of Ethiopian nationalism and identity was taken for granted. No mention was made, for example, about the neglect of all other languages in favour of Amharigna [i.e. Amharic], or the identification of Ethiopia with Christianity (Kiflu 1993:52).

The support of all Ethiopian educated elites, including fourth-generation students, for unity could be taken for granted until the end of the 1960s (Vaughan 2003: 133). Even after it was raised, the debate over the national question remained a divisive one for the student movement (Ottaway and Ottaway 1978: 117-27, Triulzi 1983: 111-27, Balsvik 1985: 277-89, Sorenson 1991), and, as we shall see in the next chapter, has remained a profoundly contentious issue up to the present day.

²⁰³ An example of this type of painting, which the curators of the museum date back to some time between the 1940s and the 1960s, is hosted in the St. George's Museum in Addis Abāba.

The relationship with colonised Africa: Ethiopia's external border

The centrality of Ethiopia for Pan-Africanist thinkers and black nationalists is widely documented in academic scholarship²⁰⁴. Few studies, though, have mapped the Ethiopian intellectual response to these ideological and political movements. Existing research has mostly focused on the non-Ethiopian side of the relationship and has almost exclusively relied on English-language sources. Inspired by a desire to strengthen the links between Ethiopia and diasporic blacks, these studies have tended to minimise tensions and contradictions or to explain them as results of external machinations by hostile colonial authorities. This paragraph explores, firstly, the ideological position of Ethiopian intellectuals with regards to European colonialism and, secondly, it focuses more specifically on the issues of race and investigates in what ways Ethiopian thinkers responded to black nationalist ideas.

Ethiopian intellectuals and European colonialism

In pre-1936 period, Amharic fictional and non-fictional output appears overwhelmingly dominated by domestic concerns such as educational policies, local events, the monarchy, Orthodox teachings, family life and moral values, or relations between different social classes. European colonialism in the rest of Africa was seldom discussed, and the fate of African people and societies was not a high priority issue in the Ethiopian intellectual agenda. When European empires were mentioned, it was in a rather matter-of-factly manner, and not to denounce them as oppressive or unjust. Expressions of Pan-African solidarity were, by large, absent. Ethiopia was, after all, a sovereign state like Britain, France and Italy, and a member of the League of Nations, and thus perceived to be qualitatively akin to the world's great powers, albeit a minor partner. Fikru, whose account aims at reinforcing the Pan-Africanist credentials of Ethiopia, nevertheless concedes that pre-1936 intellectual production was centripetal in character:

Without the backdrop of colonialism, from which Ethiopia was spared for the most part, the pre-war Ethiopian intelligentsia remained inward-looking and provincial. Despite some discursive writings on Japan, [...] Ethiopians perhaps knew more about France or Italy than their nearest neighbours on the continent (2005: 116).

This isolationist tendency combined with pragmatic considerations. The country's elite had diplomatic priorities and international challenges to face that were different from those of colonised countries in Africa and black minorities in the West. Preserving independence was a major concern, and the Ethiopian elite could not afford to antagonise Western powers by questioning the legitimacy of their imperial enterprises or discriminatory internal policies. In his

²⁰⁴ Among others, in the works by Chirenje (1987), Scott (1993), Harris (1994), Fikru (2005 and 2015), Getachew Metaferia (2005), Putnam (2007), Bonacci (2010 and 2015), Hillina (2010), Quirin (2010-2011), Vestal (2011), MacLeod (2014).

1919 state visit to the United States, Hərüy Wäldä-Səlasse addressed his African-American hosts at the Metropolitan Baptist Church in New York by stating that ‘on the part of the Ethiopian Empire we desire to express the satisfaction we have felt on hearing of the wonderful progress the Africans have made in this country’ (quoted in Harris 1994: 5). Historians and commentators were disappointed by these words, remarking that Hərüy ‘clearly misunderstood the history of the black American struggle’ (Harris 1994: 5), but it was obviously against Ethiopia’s interests to irritate the United States government. Pragmatic considerations should also inform the historical interpretation of Wərķenäh’s 1927 open invitation to qualified African-Americans to relocate to Ethiopia. More than demonstrating an ‘expanding consciousness’ and ‘shared interest and destiny’ (Harris 1994: 7), Wərķenäh’s overture, according to Garretson, is to be linked, more prosaically, to the fact that ‘he had had great difficulty recruiting and retaining British citizens and never had any success with white Americans’ (Garretson 2012: 159). Similarly, the tightening of relationships between Ethiopia and diasporic blacks during the Italian occupation was diplomatically advantageous to the exiled and internationally isolated Ethiopian government.

The Italian occupation forced the Ethiopian elites to reconsider their isolationist position, and even though domestic issues continued to dominate intellectual production, from 1936 onwards colonialism started being discussed more frequently, albeit not necessarily in negative terms. A very restricted number of works nevertheless stand out from coeval intellectual production for taking a more explicit stand against colonialism. To investigate how far the intellectuals’ criticism of colonialism went, two examples will be analysed here: Wərķenäh’s articles in *New Times and Ethiopia News* and Gərmaččäw’s *Araya*. The way Ethiopian intellectuals thought about colonialism was influenced by Social Darwinism and its unilinear vision of social progress. The division between developed nations and underdeveloped nations and the inevitability that ‘big’ nations dominate over ‘small’ ones were not questioned. Wərķenäh, as already discussed, talked about this ‘universal law’ in his speech at the opening of the Täfäri Mäkönnən School. The articles he later published on Sylvia Pankhurst’s *New Times and Ethiopia News* expand his reflections on the topic. The newspaper was founded by Pankhurst in May 1936 in response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia as a forum for pro-Ethiopia activism. Wərķenäh was, at the time, the Ethiopian ambassador in the UK, and actively contributed to Pankhurst’s publication. In terms of personal biography, Wərķenäh has spent a major part of his life serving the British Empire in India and Burma, and his thought was shaped by classic liberal principles. Perhaps the most fervent Anglophile member of the Ethiopian intelligentsia, when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 Wərķenäh was trustful that Britain would take an active role in defending Ethiopia at the League of Nation. His articles in *New Times and Ethiopia News* appeal to the basic narrative of British imperialism. Britain’s spread its high values of justice across the Empire, and the Italian aggression, Wərķenäh insists, is an occasion

to put these values in practice, particularly as a pedagogical demonstration for Britain's own colonial subjects. Wārķenāh's first articles in May-June 1936 were incisive and sombre, but as Britain and the League repeatedly failed to intervene in Ethiopia's favour, Wārķenāh grew more impatient, and by October, his articles were filled with acrimony. The most important article in his ideological trajectory was published on November 7th. Titled 'A just solution', it marks Wārķenāh's disillusionment with European imperialism – an imperialism that he had contributed to upholding, but whose double standards had, by then, become evident to him.

Unhappily, by the development of the human brain the worldly knowledge of some people and nations increased, and they consequently became more powerful than their neighbours. The strong and the greedy neglected the teachings of their good masters and, trampling the code of international morality underfoot, they marched on callously robbing their neighbours of their belongings. The bad example of robbery and aggression, euphemistically called 'colonisation', being set, it has been regularly followed by one nation after another during the past century or two, and some of the more adventurous and lucky have made a very profitable business out of it (NT&EN, 07/11/1936).

This is one of the earliest documented condemnations of colonialism by an Ethiopian intellectual, and one of the very few 1936 instances of explicit anti-colonial rhetoric on the pages of *New Times and Ethiopia News*. Wārķenāh, though, does not put into question the notion that Western nations are the most advanced, nor does he question the teleological and unilinear conception of societal development underpinning the European colonial enterprise. He denounces the hypocritical distance between the theory and the practice of imperialism, but does not put into discussion the self-professed European mission to lead backward countries towards progress. What he is pointing his finger at is that stronger nations have not lived up to their ideals of justice, and have not delivered on their promise to help weaker nations develop. Because of this, Wārķenāh reasons, European empires have to be dismantled, independence granted to all those colonies advanced enough to rule themselves, while those countries still too 'backward in knowledge' would have to become League of Nation trusteeships:

I would suggest that a special conference of all the States in the world be called together. [...] The Powers which in one way or another have acquired colonies in the past should bravely agree to hand over the independence of the colonies to their original owners, under the condition that the territories whose owners and inhabitants happen to be backward in knowledge shall remain, for the time being, under the supervision of the League of Nations and shall be helped to make the necessary progress (NT&EN, 07/11/1936).

Wärkenäh suggests, as other Ethiopian intellectuals would do after the war, that the rationale behind imperialism (stronger nations helping weaker nations develop) was not, *per se*, wrong – what is to condemn is the violent and exploitative way imperialism was realised in practice. But the hierarchy between developed and undeveloped societies, together with the assumption that it is desirable that backward nations soon develop, and develop along the lines of advanced nations, continued to inform Wärkenäh's thought. His opposition to colonialism is, in a way, a criticism of colonialism *from within*. Blackness or Africanness as oppositional identities do not interest him, nor does he try to reverse the Eurocentric narrative of African cultural inferiority. On November 21st he published a column that repeats some of his earlier arguments. Britain failed to punish Mussolini's unlawful aggression, accuses Wärkenäh, and asks: 'what must the semi-civilised, the backward, and even the savage peoples think of such incomprehensible conduct?' (*NT&EN*, 21/11/1936). Britain, in virtue of its superior civilisation, could have taken this occasion to teach 'the semi-civilised, the backward, and even the savage peoples' what is just, what is unjust and how justice should be administered according to the law. Instead, it failed to act upon its liberal values due to cowardice and self-interest. Despite the universal validity of its liberal values and the power to implement them, Britain has failed to put these values into practice, and it is because of this failure that Wärkenäh advocates the independence of the colonies.

Gərmaččāw's *Araya* offers an even more compelling exposition of these ideas. Towards the beginning of the book, Araya discusses the merits and demerits of colonialism with two Frenchmen and a Vietnamese traveller named Taytoh Minh. Although Gərmaččāw most probably personally sympathised with the anti-colonial arguments of Araya and Taytoh Minh, he gives ample space to the arguments of the two Frenchmen. The discussion is rather restrained, and no point of view dominates over the other; the European and non-European perspective are both authoritative and persuasive. Taytoh Minh's speech is all the more remarkable as it introduces an argument based on cultural relativism – an occurrence that is extremely rare, if not unique, in coeval Ethiopia's intellectual production:

As for morals, it is an adequate excuse for you to claim that you came to preach the Christian religion. In the first place, there is no people which does not have a religion, so if it observes its own religion and observes its laws properly, [this] will be sufficient for modern culture (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 56, quoted in Kane 1975: 182).

This is essentially an argument in favour of the possibility to achieve *zämänawinnāt* via a process of hybridisation of Western ideas with local moral and political values. However, *zämänawinnāt* and *səḥtane* are used normatively, as the ultimate objective of every culture and terminal point of every society's evolution. This modernity could be achieved in different ways, and be complemented by indigenous ethical systems and political institutions, but these possible

variants do not substantially change the desired result: a technologically advanced nation-state with a centralised system of education, a sophisticated infrastructural network, an effective military able to guarantee public order and enforce the law. 'Modern civilisation' is the one the West has achieved (although compromising on its moral standards) and that the non-West has to learn. Taytoh Minh criticises colonialism because, with its abuses and exploitation, it is not the best way to civilise 'small' nations. The West remains framed as the source of knowledge, science and law and the non-West, antithetically, as the source of moral integrity:

Justice and the real laws of democracy and freedom will not permit you to keep a foreign country your colony. You claim you will train the people in the country in modes of living and in behaviour. However, in fact, to teach civilisation it is unnecessary to invade a country and to deprive its inhabitants of their rights. [...] It is not possible to deny that in the old days many perished in internecine conflicts and lawlessness and also that considerable harm ensued from unnecessary disease and ignorance. However, it must not be forgotten that there are many bad things which came in with modern culture. Now that such things as alcohol, fornication and other vices have become widespread in all those colonies, how much harm have they done? [...] If you say it is your duty to teach the Christian religion, can you not teach following the words of the gospel exactly and preach and explain without occupying the country and taking away the people's freedom? (Gərmaččäw 1948/49: 56, quoted in Kane 1975: 152).

Taytoh Minh focuses here on values of freedom and political independence, accusing European countries of appropriating natural resources in the colonies for their own benefit. Can civilisation not be taught without physically occupying other people's land? Overall, the entitlement of the West to teach civilisation is not put into question, nor does Taytoh Minh question the racist underpinning of the 'civilising mission'.

In general, in Amharic intellectual production, when colonialism was criticised it was not from the perspective of black nationalism or Pan-Africanism, but from the perspective of classical liberalism. Wärkenäh's critique was internal to the European liberal tradition, and did not question the validity of that body of knowledge. On the contrary, it upheld it even more strongly, as colonialism is criticised by Wärkenäh precisely for departing from that universally-valid tradition. The philosophical underpinnings of colonialism were left substantially unanalysed. References to anti-colonial leaders and movements were almost completely absent from Amharic fictional and non-fictional output well into the late 1950s. And despite this criticism, Wärkenäh's and Gərmaččäw's Europhilia did not abate. This was perhaps the more constitutive contradiction of Ethiopian political thought, particularly that of the first and second generation. The West kept being looked at as a model, but the extent to which 'modern Western

civilisation' was constitutively defined by the experience of colonialism went almost always overlooked. The Italian occupation was condemned by all Ethiopian intellectuals, but they kept pointing at France or Britain as examples for Ethiopia to follow, either taking no notice of the fact that they too were colonial powers, or, if French and British imperial expansionism was condemned, neglecting to account that imperial expansionism was not a collateral by-product of European modernity, but an in-built constituent thereof.

Black nationalism and race

As we have just discussed, analysing European colonialism was not, for many decades, a priority in the Ethiopian intellectual agenda, and in the few occasions in which it was discussed, Pan-African and black nationalist perspectives were not usually referenced. The Grand Narrative is 'explicitly non-African, even anti-African' (Clapham 2002: 48). It looks north and north-east, towards the Middle East and the Mediterranean, rather than south-west towards the rest of the continent. Both the Christian and Muslim areas of what would become the Ethiopian state had a long history of philosophical, religious and artistic exchanges with Sudan, Egypt, the Levant, the Arabic peninsula, the Caucasus, and Southern Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Italy (Cerulli 1968). Such sense of regional belonging was also tied to a specific racial consciousness. Of course the term 'race', with its scientific and biological connotations, is European in origin, and needs to be handled carefully when talking about pre-modern Ethiopian history. European Orientalist scholarship, in its assumption that the Semitic-speaking people of Ethiopia were more similar to white Europeans and more culturally advanced than their non-Semitic-speaking neighbours, depicted a picture of Ethiopia where racial differences were greatly exaggerated. As for other issues in Ethiopian studies, though, the divisive intervention of European scholars drew from internal Ethiopian constructs, although often misinterpreting them. Foreign and local scholarship influenced each other, and the *habäša* always had a strong agency in directing the way foreigners saw and portrayed them (Martínez d'Alòs-Moner 2004, Belcher 2012). Although the prejudicial interpretations of European Orientalists rigidified inter-group perceptions, *habäša* identity had always been based on a sense of physical difference vis-à-vis the darker-skinned people living in the western and southern lowlands of the Horn. Such perceived difference in physical attributes had a prominent cultural component, and it was used to reinforce the more important distinction between Christians and non-Christians. The principal sources of discrimination were religion and culture, but physical differences, skin colour among them, also played a role in the otherisation of non-*habäša* people. Identities took shape, of course, in a specific economic context. The long-established economy of slavery in the Horn of Africa strongly conditioned processes of identity formation. Slavery primarily targeted non-Christians, but came also to be associated to a specific set of physical features, those of the 'pagan' pastoralist lowlanders that were the main object of slave raids. The biblical division, repeated in the *Käbrä Nägäst*, between the three genealogies of the

sons of Noah, and the story of the curse of Ham, provided the context in which slavery was discussed. According to Zitelmann,

In Ethiopia, the importance of ‘race’ remained largely embedded – and as a result also partly ‘tamed’ – in the localised tradition of the Old Testament. According to this discourse, the ‘Galla’ and the ‘Shankalla’ are serfs and slaves by the will of God (Zitelmann 2001: 175).

Exemplary from this point of view is *Aläḳa Tayyā Gäbrä-Maryam’s* 1922 historical work *Yältiyopya Həzb Tarik* (‘History of the people of Ethiopia’) that, for its reliance on the Holy Scriptures, is perhaps ‘the most influential ‘traditional’ text on ‘race’ and its linkage to creation’ (Zitelmann 2001: 175). Together with an ‘unrestrained diatribe against Islam and the Muslim holy book’ (Bahru 2002: 148), Tayyā’s study contains statements that are, to say the least, problematic, such as when the *aläḳa* argues that the Semitic people of Ethiopia are ‘so distinct from the people of Africa that they are called true human beings’ ([1922] 1972: 39).

Fikru talks about this prejudice by claiming it was common to both Cushitic- and Semitic-speaking groups, but, in his attempt to undermine the case of Oromo nationalism and demonstrate that *habäša* and Oromo people had always lived in harmony, he forgets that the Oromo were too racialised and discriminated against based on physical attributes (Baxter 1994: 171-173, Leenco 1998: 137-144, Sorenson 1993: 61, Sorenson 1998: 241, Asafa 1996 and 2009). The rest of his argument, though, cogently captures the overlapping of physical and religious identity markers:

Both Kushitic and Semitic-speakers were contemptuous of the animist and darker-skinned Nilotic and Omotic minorities like the Shanqella, most of whom resided in pockets of isolation along the southern and southwestern borderlands. Whereas Muslim and Christian Ethiopians were tied together through identical yet competing historical and religious identities, sharp cultural markers were drawn between them and peripheral groups. Moreover, as non-Muslims and non-Christians, the latter lay most exposed to slave raiders, bearing the stigma of slavery even long after its abolition (Fikru 2005: 103).

Fikru’s conclusion is that, in the eyes of Ethiopia’s *habäša* or Amharised elite, the status of Ethiopia’s minority groups ‘was in many ways not unlike that of diasporan blacks’ (Fikru 2005: 103).

A number of incidents in the pre-1941 period seemed to suggest that the Ethiopian elites, to the dismay of Ethiopia’s diasporic supporters, rejected the identification with

blackness²⁰⁵. Robert Skinner, an American diplomat, reports that in 1897 Benito Sylvain, a Haitian poet, proposed that Mənilək become the leader of an international organisation of blacks working for the liberation of the race. Mənilək applauded Sylvain's offer, but declined to be involved in the organisation. Skinner quotes him explaining his negative response on the account that 'I am not a negro. [...] I am a Caucasian' (quoted in Skinner 1906: 130-132). At the time of the Italian occupation, Marcus Garvey, one of the first Ethiopianists, was so disappointed in his dealings with Ethiopian representatives that, in a series of essays in the journal *Black Man*, he complained that the Ethiopians regarded themselves as dark-skinned Caucasians and looked down upon blacks as inferiors (Fikru 2005: 102). It is complicated to assess the accuracy of these historical accounts, considering how politicised and propaganda-prone racial issues were at the time, but it is nevertheless safe to conclude that 'for quite a while, Ethiopia [did not] reciprocate [the] identification with black nationalists' (Mazrui 2004: 120)²⁰⁶. In Gərmaččāw's novel, Araya reacts quite warmly when an old Russian man tells him that 'from your face I suspected you were an Ethiopian. I have read in books that you Ethiopians are quite different from other races of Africa' (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 51).

Indigenous conceptions of ethnic identity mixed with Western racial theories in the thought of Mäkonən Dästa, the first Ethiopian anthropology graduate, who had studied at Harvard under Alfred M. Tozzler (1877-1954) and Earnest A. Hooton (1887-1954) and worked as Ethiopian Minister of Education from 1941 to 1944. Mäkonən did not leave any written records documenting his ideas, but his views are described in the accounts of two anthropologists: Clarendon S. Coon (1904-1981), who travelled to Ethiopia in 1933-1934²⁰⁷, and Siegfried Nadel (1903-1956), who travelled to Ethiopia in 1943. Coon's report, written in 1936 in the context of the fascist invasion of Ethiopia, stressed internal racial differences between different Ethiopian people, and could be read to indirectly endorse Italian anti-Amhara propaganda and divide and rule strategies. Despite the book's pro-Italian political leanings, the

²⁰⁵ Many anthropological studies on the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States suggest that this attitude persists to the present day (Habecker 2012). See also a vitriolic 2009 piece by Asafa Jalata, who is resentful against diasporic Ethiopianists for perpetuating an idealised image of Ethiopia as 'black motherland' that completely ignores the discrimination suffered by non-*habäša* people at the hands of the *habäša* (Asafa 2009).

²⁰⁶ Mazrui's work on Ethiopia presents a refreshingly original perspective, able to transcend both the prejudicial readings of much European scholarship and the uncritical romanticism of much African/black scholarship. Seifudein Adem (2009) has analysed Mazrui's role in Ethiopian studies. While acknowledging Ethiopia's historical achievements and hailing Ethiopia/Abyssinia as an example for Africans and blacks, Mazrui controversially decried what he saw as the *habäša*'s 'racial self-denial': 'It is one of the ironies of history that this reluctant stimulant of Pan-Africanism in others should subsequently invite others to build Pan-Africanism on its soil. It was not a case of Ethiopia choosing pan-Africanism. It was a case of Pan-Africanism choosing Ethiopia' (quoted in Seifudein 2009: 566-567).

²⁰⁷ In his travelogue Coon talks about an Ethiopian student from Harvard who had studied anthropology, named 'Gabri Zaudu' in the text. According to Zitellmann, due to the fact that Mäkonən Dästa was the only Harvard-educated Ethiopian anthropologist in the period, 'there can be hardly any doubt that 'Gabri Zaudu' was Makonnen Desta' (2001: 173).

way Coon reports Mäkönnən Dästa's thought seems faithful enough, since Nadel separately attributes to Mäkönnən the same ideas.

Contrary to some of his contemporaries like Wärkenäh, who preferred talking about 'nations' rather than 'races', Mäkönnən picked up from the Harvard academic shelves precisely the notion of race. According to Coon's report, Mäkönnən complained that in the United States all those who are not white are uniformly considered black. For Mäkönnən, this was 'unscientific', as 'the Ethiopians are of Semitic origin, and not Negroes' (quoted in Coon 1936: 23). Mäkönnən openly rejected the identification with blackness, pointing out how blackness in Ethiopia is usually associated to slavery (Coon 1936: 23). On the one hand, then, he was claiming that the *habäša* were different from 'black slaves'. Yet, he was aware that stressing racial diversity risked undermining the integrity of Ethiopian statehood. Starting from the premise that *habäša* and African people are racially different, therefore, Mäkönnən searched a way to advance the cultural and racial unity of the Ethiopian empire through anthropology. According to Nadel, Mäkönnən wanted anthropologists to 'study the question of cultural adaptation – so as to bring about the assimilation of all races of Ethiopia' (Nadel 1943, quoted in Zitelmann 2001: 164). His objective was to build up a 'racial defence of the 'empire'' (Zitelmann 2001: 165). With this purpose in mind, Mäkönnən's racial theory was based on the notion that Ethiopians, although ethnically different from each other, all together constituted a 'we-race', and that such 'we-race' was veritably the original race from which all humans derived. Nadel so describes Mäkönnən's thought in this regard:

[According to Mäkönnən] the Ethiopians are not a race viz. one of the known races; the great racial variety in Ethiopia cannot be explained by migrations. Rather, the Ethiopian is the 'generalised type of humanity'. What [Mäkönnən] means, is that Ethiopia is the home and cradle of mankind, a sort of we-race, from which all the other races have sprung and diversified themselves (quoted in Zitelmann 2001: 165).

This theory served two main purposes. Firstly, by claiming that all Ethiopians belonged to a constitutively hybrid, but unified race, it offered the Ethiopian elite an instrument to legitimise their empire-building and neutralise the Italian divisive propaganda. In other words, Mäkönnən intended to theorise the racial equivalent of the Grand Narrative's idea of nationhood. To the already-popularised conception that Ethiopian people are culturally different, but all identify with the same nation, Mäkönnən added the notion that Ethiopian people are racially different, but together form a composite, but single racial unit.

For the whole period under consideration in this thesis, intellectuals like Mäkönnən sought to theorise for Ethiopia a political model not of *unity-in-diversity*, but of *unity-and-*

*diversity*²⁰⁸. The emphasis on diversity was at the service of the powerful, and served to confirm the superiority, distinctiveness and privilege of the Amharised, Christianised ruling elite. The rhetoric of unity and inclusivity was aimed, first of all, at marginalised groups within the Ethiopian state, and served to guarantee their loyalty and support. It also served a second function, more directly connected with processes of elite formation. For Haylä Səlasse and those faithful to him, it was important to make sure that all those who, whether by hereditary right, economic wealth or educational achievements, wielded a degree of influence in society remained loyal to the state. They had to feel ‘Ethiopian’ and serve the Emperor. Here Mäkönnən, and the government with him, were worried by power networks that existed parallel to, or in antagonism with the state. The genealogical bonds uniting the aristocracy were a particular source of concern for Haylä Səlasse’s planned centralisation. For their tangible and bodily nature, blood ties were feared to remain much stronger than any ideological allegiance noblemen could feel towards the state. The theory of the ‘we-race’ gave the state biological credentials and enabled it to demand loyalty on genetic, not only ideological, grounds. Mäkönnən intended to use the notion of ‘we-race’ to offer a ‘corporate identity’ to the actual core group of the ruling stratum’ (Zitelmänn 2001: 169). The theory of the ‘we-race’ was not based on values of civil and social equality, but on an attempt to reinforce and unite the elite. Like his contemporaries, Mäkönnən urged unity in order to strengthen hierarchy and advocated horizontal bonds in order to ensure vertical loyalty.

Secondly, by drawing on the Grand Narrative’s notions of authenticity and antiquity (the Ethiopians as the ‘original race’), Mäkönnən could posit a relationship of strictly hierarchical solidarity between Ethiopia and the rest of Africa. The relationship of unity-and-diversity Mäkönnən envisioned between the Ethiopian ruling classes and the Ethiopian people was the same he envisioned between the Ethiopian ruling classes and the African continent. Mäkönnən ‘did not imagine a ‘nation’, but a ‘we-race’ of the ‘Ethiopian’ who – allegedly – naturally dominated an ‘empire’ in Africa’ (Zitelmänn 2001: 174). For the future of the continent, Mäkönnən imagined a ‘Pan-Negro state under Ethiopian hegemony’ (Coon 1936: 24). He quotes Mäkönnən saying the following:

Although we are not black, [...] we must identify ourselves with them. We are all Africans, and we are all non-whites. Our people have been too aristocratic, too discriminating. This is an age of democracy and all coloured peoples must work together. We will be their organisers and leaders in order to maintain our rightful position in the world (quoted in Coon 1936: 23-24).

²⁰⁸ The rhetoric of ‘unity-in-diversity’ is at the centre of the present-day EPRDF-sponsored image of nationhood. Two articles, by Bach (2013) and Orłowska (2013), brilliantly describe how Pan-Ethiopian narratives were deployed alongside an image of Ethiopia as multinational and multicultural during the Ethiopian festival of the millennium in 2007/2008.

Mäkönnən conceived this ‘Pan-Negro state’ as a ‘Greater Ethiopia’ or ‘Greater Ethiopian Empire’ writ very large, but such political utopia, Zitelmann thinks, ‘would hardly have bridged the gap between the elitist ‘we’ and ‘them’, the serfs and slaves’ (Zitelmann 2001: 174). This could be interpreted as a failure, on the part of Mäkönnən, to overcome the Grand Narrative’s unicentrism. On the other side, Mäkönnən’s idea of a ‘Pan-Negro state under Ethiopia’ was not that much a romantic utopia, but rather a skewed diplomatic plan. It tapped into the aspirations of diasporic blacks and could be used to foster their support, while at the same time establishing an ideological precedent for a future extension of Ethiopian political hegemony. Coon was decidedly not in favour of Mäkönnən’s vision of a ‘Pan-Negro state under Ethiopia’, but observes that Mäkönnən ‘used it on the American Negroes to great advantage’ (1936: 24). This is a good example of the ability of Ethiopian intellectuals to selectively appropriate and manipulate foreign narratives on Ethiopia, and to use them for their own advantage. While black nationalist and Pan-African arguments were used to stress the rhetoric of horizontal unity between all African people, the European semiticist paradigm was employed to bolster the distinctiveness of the Ethiopian elite. Western racial theories were bent to serve both objectives at the same time. While reinstating the notion that the Amharised and Christianised Ethiopian elites are not black, Mäkönnən’s ‘we-race’ also offered a scientific foundation to unionist arguments both in the Horn and in Africa at large, thus promoting, at the same time, ideas of unity and difference. Both when it came to Ethiopia’s internal border and its external border with the rest of Africa, Ethiopian intellectuals struggle to build narratives emphasising harmony but retaining a clear sense of hierarchy. This goal was inherently contradictory. The exceptionalism of the Grand Narrative lent itself to distinguishing between centres and peripheries, superior and inferiors, and was therefore at odds with ideals of Pan-African or Pan-Ethiopian brotherhood.

Although relationships with black diasporic groups kept being strategically cultivated, until the 1950s ‘the official policy of the government of Emperor Haile Selassie was to emphasize that Ethiopia was part of the Middle East rather than part of Africa’ (Mazrui 2002: 84). Various cases are documented of members of the Ethiopian educated class denying, sometimes maliciously but most of the times innocently, being African, an attitude that caused friction with the African scholarship students that arrived in Addis Abäba at the end of the 1950s. In the May 1959 UCAA newsletter, a scholarship student complained that Ethiopians referred to scholarship students as ‘the Africans’ thus clearly implying Ethiopians are not Africans. Pivotal component of the separateness that Ethiopian students felt vis-à-vis other Africans was the fact that Ethiopia, contrary to other African societies, had not been colonised. For the exceptionalist corporate identity of the Ethiopian educated stratum to be maintained, the experience of the Italian occupation had to be downplayed as much as possible. Instead of analysing how the fascist years had exposed some of Ethiopia’s weaknesses (weaknesses that in

many cases were common to Ethiopia and the rest of Africa), Ethiopian intellectuals removed the issue of Italian colonialism altogether, claiming once more for their country an acolonial identity.

The Italian occupation

In 1988, Bahru Zewde urged a reassessment of the Italian occupation, pointing out that ‘it is quite evident that the Italian legacy cannot be merely subsumed, as has been the custom, under road-building and prostitution’ (1988: 278). And yet, as recently as 2011, Braukämper decries that ‘a proper assessment of the historical significance of the time between 1935 and 1941 is still pending’ (2011: 164). The representation and interpretation of the occupation in Ethiopian scholarship²⁰⁹ is regulated by a rigidly formulaic nationalist framework, based on the glorification of the patriots’ resistance and the celebration of a ‘nation’ that, united and resilient, successfully fought against and repelled the invaders. Rather than an ‘occupation’, the period from 1935 to 1941 is often talked about as a second Italo-Ethiopian war, won by the Ethiopians just like its antecedent in 1895-96. In the poems regularly published on newspapers around Adwa day, the authors attempted to correlate the two ‘victories’ as closely as possible, sometimes going as far as describing Adwa as a victory against fascists²¹⁰. Thanks to the resistance of the *arbäññočč* (resistance fighters), the Italians never managed to establish control over large parts of the country, particularly mountainous areas. From this premise, nationalist historiography argues that Ethiopia ‘has never really been forced under a colonial yoke and that the survival of its independence was principally uninterrupted’ (Braukämper 2011: 180). The fascist years are therefore presented as a marginal interlude in the history of the country, an overall negligible intermission ‘which can hardly reduce Ethiopia’s reputation as a potent bulwark of anti-colonial resistance in Africa’ (Braukämper 2011: 180).

The defeat of the Italians in 1941 is narrated in nationalist historiography as the moment Ethiopia ‘got back on track’ in the teleologically-oriented path indicated by the Grand Narrative. Patriotically represented as a heroic uprising against foreign assaulters, the theme of the occupation always conveys the idea of glory even when the author acknowledges Ethiopia’s military unpreparedness, diplomatic weakness and economic underdevelopment vis-à-vis Italy.

²⁰⁹ A vast body of scholarly works exists on the Italian occupation, most of which, as to be expected, comes from Italian, British and Ethiopian historians. A classic work on the topic is Sbacchi (1996). For a brief history of the armed resistance against the Italians, see Aregawi (2003). Here I only focus on the Ethiopian historiographical tradition.

²¹⁰ Example of the analogies drawn between Adwa and the occupation years are two poems published on *Addis Zämän*. The first described how Haylä Səlasse concluded the work initiated by Mənilək ‘That evil was crushed by Mənilək/And buried by Täfäri/We, the sons of Täfäri, feel proud/Our enemy is dead and will not arise again’ (Vol. 25 No. 339 on Yakatit 6, 1958). The second remembers the battle of Adwa as a victory against fascism: ‘All Fascists standing at Adwa/They were waiting for him [i.e. Mənilək] what would come/Fascists were proud of their weapons/ Mənilək defeated them with his arms’ (Vol. 25 No. 354, Yakatit 23, 1958).

Such minimisation appears puzzling to scholars. With regards to Amharic literary output, Kane notices a general tendency to refrain from an in-depth analysis of the fascist years:

those stories in which the Italian invasion and occupation form the main substance of the work are generally quite disappointing in quality. They are mainly vehicles for promoting patriotism, [...] rarely containing any insight into the period or its problems (1975: 152).

Novels, as aesthetic products, do not necessarily have the duty to offer in-depth scholarly analysis of historical events, but in this case Amharic novels portray the occupation in the same way as Amharic historiography. Both were vehicles of the official imperial narrative.

On the most insightful studies on how the memory of the Italian occupation has remained embedded in the conventions of the Grand Narrative is Charles McClellan's 1996 article 'Observations on the Ethiopian nation, its nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian war'. McClellan recognises that mainstream nationalist historiography has contributed important studies on topics such as the value and success of the Ethiopian armed resistance, the Italian war atrocities, and Haylā Səlassə's diplomatic efforts while in exile. Nevertheless, historiography on the occupation has, since the immediate post-liberation period, been informed by a 'nationalist mythology' that reflects a 'degree of historical amnesia' (McClellan 1996: 66). 'Nationalist mythology' is McClellan's terminology to refer to the Grand Narrative. The term 'amnesia' points at the removal from public and historical consciousness of some of the legacies of the fascist conquest. For McClellan, the Italian occupation

was an event that [...] created opportunity for Ethiopians to re-examine the nature and meaning of their state. Unfortunately the opportunity was not fully used, since in the aftermath of the war, Ethiopians ignored many of the war's fundamental lessons and merely replaced old mythology with new (McClellan 1996: 57).

At the core of the 'patriotic indoctrination' (McClellan 1996: 66) of post-liberation novels and historiography was the narrow focus on Ethiopia's unity and moral strength. The international context in which the fascist aggression took place is rarely accounted for, and Italian history itself is presented in a rather reductionist manner, with not only the 1935 invasion, but also the rise of fascism in the early 1920s, one-sidedly explained as products of the desire to avenge the Adwa defeat. Other causes are cited – Asäffa Gäbrä-Maryam's *Əndäwaŋtačč kəraračč* ('She went out and never came back', 1953/54) mentions that the Italians coveted Ethiopia's fertility, beauty and resources and were offended at the minor role they were relegated to during the Scramble for Africa – but the Grand Narrative's assimilationism and unicentrism dominated the writers' historiographical reading. Italian and European history are conceived as extensions of Ethiopian history. The ideological, socio-political and economic system underpinning Italian

colonialism was left unanalysed. Post-liberation Amharic novels, newspaper articles and historiography are centred on the military struggle between Italian and Ethiopian forces, while colonial ideology appears to have been a lesser concern. The point of view is internal to Ethiopia, and the main focus is the military and social cohesion of the country under aggression. Fictional and non-fictional works celebrated the courage and military prowess of Ethiopian soldiers, the glorious resistance of the patriots, and the heroic sacrifices of the martyrs fallen to defend their country's independence and religion. Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw's *Almotkum Bəyye Alwašəm* ('I will not lie and say that I was not dead', 1954/55) shows the protagonist Ato Tāmačču devastated at the death of his son Kənde on the battlefield, but honoured that Kənde died for such a noble cause and proud that his son's body lies on top of the enemy he killed before dying. As a result of such focus on military deeds and heroism, the specific *colonial* character of the Italian invasion does not emerge as a significant element in the way the occupation is narrated.

The Ethiopian defeats at Mayčäw and on the Southern front are blamed on two factors: first, the technological gap between the two armies and second, the lack of unity among the Ethiopians (Zealelem 1990: 32). As for the first factor, the widespread tendency to characterise the Italian attack as a surprise strike allowed Ethiopian writers to better explain the country's (and the Emperor's) unpreparedness. Considering that at Adwa forty years before the two armies were more or less evenly balanced in terms of equipment and armaments, the big technological gap between the two forty years later would seem a pertinent question to investigate for intellectuals so closely concerned with *ləmat* and *zämänawinnät*. Part of the answer is the Italians' use of chemical gas, outlawed in various post-WW1 international conventions, as well as the arms embargo against Ethiopia²¹¹ and Haylä Səlasse's misplaced trust in the League of Nations – all factors that Amharic writers insightfully identify (Zealelem 1990: 32). Nevertheless, accounting for the gap between the two armies would have also meant to consider Ethiopia's limited achievements in the previous decades, despite the promises of the Grand Narrative that Ethiopia was on the same level of European countries. Confronting this issue would have meant, for the writers, to question the Grand Narrative, and, faced with the daunting scenario of putting into discussion Ethiopia's overriding political ideology, the writers typically preferred to keep silent.

A similar uneasiness is betrayed in the authors' treatment of what they identify as the second cause of Ethiopia's defeat: the country's lack of unity. Most fictional and non-fictional works revisiting the occupation describe Ethiopia as torn between two factions, on one side the patriots and on the other side the collaborators (called *banda*). The two groups are portrayed as impermeable monolithic blocs, antithetically representing moral righteousness on the one hand

²¹¹ For more information on the embargo, see Marcus (1983b).

and moral wickedness on the other. Such Manichean distinction does not consider collaboration as a political or ideological choice, or a position some Ethiopians were forced by circumstances to take up to merely survive in those difficult years. Collaboration with the occupiers is always described as resulting from sins such as greed and cowardice. In the desire to preserve Ethiopia's nationalist mythology, the oppositional voices that surfaced during the occupation were actively suppressed, and the collaborators silenced. To date, their histories and motivations have never been studied in detail in academic or non-academic literature. The voices of the patriots, on the other hand, have been all-too-present in the country's historical imagination. In 1941, all those who had contributed to various degrees to the Ethiopian resistance were encouraged to come forth and claim benefits for services they had rendered the country during the war. Verifying these stories, though, was hard, and no doubt many were encouraged to exaggerate the details of their past deeds. Stories of embellished heroism were readily incorporated in historiographical books and school textbooks and commemorated in yearly festivities such as Patriots' Day on May 5th. In these celebrations, former *askari* (soldiers in the Italian colonial army) and *banda* are never called out to speak in public. After being restored on the throne, Haylä Səlasse granted an amnesty to all those who had cooperated with the Italians, but rather than the end-result of a process of multilateral reconciliation, the amnesty was more directly aimed at quickly dispose of the voices of those who had not remained faithful to the Emperor.

The events on the ground during the occupation show how simplistic the writers' dichotomy between resistance and collaboration was. The history of the occupation saw many Ethiopians take up intermediate positions, shifting from one side to the other, compromising between factions. In most cases, the choice of who to side with depended on practical survival strategies. Just like in other war contexts, the first objective of many Ethiopians was to preserve their life and defend their family, livelihood and property. Patriotism 'was not always the defining motive' of their choices (McClellan 1996: 62). The peasants were probably victimised by both the Ethiopian patriots and Italian (or pro-Italian) forces. Many patriots only fought for brief periods of time and not for the whole duration of the war. Some resistance leaders surrendered to the Italians and were allowed to live in Addis Abāba in relative peace, at least until the bloody repression following the failed attack on Graziani's life in February 1937. Clashes between different patriot groups were not at all uncommon. The war opened many more fault lines in Ethiopian society than the one-dimensional binary between patriots and collaborators implies. When the Italians invaded, local conflicts flared up in many different areas of the country. Braukämper, for example, reports that 'incessant internal fighting' broke out in the south when news of Mayčāw defeat spread: 'it was obviously the most chaotic and cruel time the inhabitants of those areas had ever experienced' (2011: 171). The war was, for Ethiopians, 'as much a civil war as one against foreign aggression' (McClellan 1996: 57).

The Italians greatly contributed to putting one faction against the other. Their propaganda represented a conflict-ridden Ethiopia, whose internal discriminatory practices, slavery and inter-ethnic oppression could only be solved via the pacifying intervention of an enlightened European power. This narrative was, for Haylä Səlasse and the pro-*zämänawinnāt* intellectuals close to him, extremely insidious, as it dared questioning the main dogma of the Grand Narrative, that of Ethiopia's unity and transcendental nationhood. Ethiopian writers defended the Grand Narrative by portraying the war as 'great nationalistic victory in which all Ethiopians (or nearly all) had contributed' (McClellan 1996: 66). The Italians were accused of single-handedly disrupting Ethiopia's time-honoured social harmony and inventing divisions where traditionally there were none. In their attempt to disprove Italian propaganda,

the Ethiopians undertook special efforts to argue Ethiopia's 'nationhood'. Here the government asserted that the great majority of Ethiopians supported the war, that the people responded enthusiastically to the call-up, and that even after the Emperor departed the country in 1936, his compatriots continued their resistance (McClellan 1996: 61).

Although this has remained the hegemonic interpretation of the 1935-41 period, historical records present a more complicated picture. Italian propaganda exploited already-existing discontent and divisions, and the fascists' divide and rule policies proved effective because they addressed long-standing internal grievances.

The war greatly divided Ethiopians against themselves. While some of the factions evident during the war were emerging earlier, the war reinforced and broadened these, and these factions dominated Ethiopian politics in the post-war period. The Italians in the 1930s had ready opportunity to promote a divide and rule policy in Ethiopia (McClellan 1996: 57)

The Italians systematically favoured groups that until that moment had been excluded from power, such as Muslims, while Orthodox Christians and the Amharas were singled out for repression (Sbacchi 1977). They divided Italian East Africa in macro-provinces along ethno-cultural lines, and allowed other languages, such as Arabic and Oromo, to be taught in schools alongside Amharic. The Italian attempts to foment internal discord were not entirely successful, and many non-Amhara remained mistrustful of the Italians' advances. Many, though, responded positively to the Italian reforms. Muslims 'largely welcomed Italian policy, and this did not endear them to the Ethiopians fighting for national liberation' (Abbink 1998: 117). The Italian abolition of the exploitative *gäbbar* system²¹² 'was seen as a liberation by many of the rural underclass' (Abbink 1998: 117). In Southern Ethiopia, for instance, 'the Italian colonialists

²¹² System of land tenure. The *gäbbar* was the tribute-paying peasant.

enjoyed a notable amount of sympathy and active collaboration from a large part of the population' (Braukämper 2011: 172). In that area of the country, the Hadiyya, the Sidaama and the Arsi Oromo 'openly sympathized with the collapse of Ethiopian rule and looked forward to welcoming the invaders as liberators' (Braukämper 2011: 167). More or less spontaneous uprisings against the *näffäñña* sprung up in the south, where the confusion and temporary power vacuum created by the invasion also led to inter-ethnic clashes between rival local groups. Soon after the Italians entered Addis Abäba in May 1936, in Wälläga the hereditary rulers of the local Oromo dynasty declared the establishment of an independent polity called Western Oromo Confederation (WOC) and offered themselves as a mandate territory of the League of Nations (Ezekiel 2002b: 76). At an elite level, the Italians gained support of prominent members of the aristocracy, most notably *Ras Səyüm Mängäša* of Təgray and *Ras Haylu Täklä-Haymanot* of Gojjam, who had long resented Haylä Səlasse's centralisation policies.

As these examples show, the Italian rule left behind a 'lasting legacy of interethnic discord considerably heightened by the bitter memories of bloody confrontations during the five years period' (Ahmed 2000: 159)²¹³. The events during the occupation signalled that 'many Ethiopians were discontented, and many had only weak loyalty to the existing state' (McClellan 1996: 59), thus suggesting that pre-war nation-building had been flawed and unsuccessful. Nonetheless, in literature and historiography, these fault lines were not accounted for, and in the desire to reaffirm the ideal of Ethiopian unity, the 'disagreements [and] the differing visions [were] merely papered over' (McClellan 1996: 66). The Italo-Ethiopian war made apparent that there were some deep-rooted internal divisions in Ethiopia, but the Ethiopian elites preferred to reaffirm the validity of traditional political culture rather than addressing them. The intellectuals' silence on this issue is comparable to their silence about the causes of the technological gap between Italy and Ethiopia. The reticence in addressing existing social rifts persisted for the thirty years of imperial rule following the liberation. Tensions were dealt with only when they surfaced, while the deep-seated grievances on which they rested were ignored as long as they were dormant. Once again, 'the unity of the nation was assumed and largely

²¹³ For a similar elaboration of this argument see Borruso (2001). Over the years, Bahru Zewde and Christopher Clapham have offered opposing interpretations on the political cohesion of the country at the eve of the Italian invasion. Clapham argued that 'Haile Selassie led a united Ethiopia against the invaders' (1969: 18). For Bahru, this is an 'enigmatic statement' caused by Clapham's 'enchantment with the Emperor's centralization' (Bahru 1984: 3). He adds, polemically, 'we are left wondering what to make of Haile Selassie Gusga (who defected to the Italians at a critical moment), Ras Haylu (who was the archcollaborator of the Italian Occupation) and Däjach Ayalew (another collaborator), not to mention the Azäbo-Raya (who inflicted such devastating and gruesome blows on the Ethiopian troops fleeing from the Battle of Mäichew). [...] The fact of the matter is feudal Ethiopia in 1896 was much more united against external aggression than feudo-capitalist Ethiopia in 1935' (Bahru 1984: 3). Clapham nevertheless stood by his earlier assessment, and in his latest scholarly work on the Haylä Səlasse era he insists that 'it said much for Haile Selassie's nation-building efforts that only a single Ethiopian notable, his Tigrayan son-in-law Haile Selassie Gusga, defected to the Italians; an almost united country thus confronted the invaders' (Clapham 2015: 190). It is worth noticing that Donham supports Bahru's interpretation (1986: 28)

unquestioned; many at the center understood Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic state, but one bound firmly together by ancient traditions of monarchy, church and culture’ and did not want to admit that in fact ‘Ethiopia was vulnerable on this issue’ (McClellan 1996: 60). Political thought of the post-independence period was primarily concerned with defending and preserving the existing system. Although the events of the occupation showed that ‘Ethiopian nationhood could and was called into question’ (McClellan 1996: 59), the customary state nationalism endured. Ethiopia kept being conceived and ruled as if it was still the old Solomonic Empire. In Clapham’s words, “‘nation-building’, insofar as it was pursued at all, took the form only of the extension of political and social forms characteristic of the central highlands, such as Christianity and the Amharic language, to other parts of the country’ (Clapham 2005: 1066).

The Emperor’s policy dictated that the divisiveness that had emerged in Ethiopia during the occupation be dismissed, ignored and denied. And yet, post-independence intellectual production reveals a certain apprehension. The Italian propaganda touched a nerve, and many intellectuals remained concerned about the danger it posed to the Grand Narrative. Kābbādā Mikael wrote his *Ethiopia and Western Civilisation* as a long rebuttal of Italian propaganda about the persistence of slavery in Ethiopia. His detailed treatment of the obstacles Ethiopian emperors faced in trying to abolish slavery, as well as his description of how slaves in Ethiopia were humanely and compassionately cared for (Kābbādā 1948/49: 58-71), are conducted in a very defensive tone, showing that, eight years after the liberation, he felt the point had not yet been brought home and the matter had not yet been settled once for all. Arguments like Kābbādā’s ‘belied a certain fear’ (McClellan 1996: 61) indicating that at least some members of the Ethiopian elite ‘knew deep in their hearts that the supposed solidarity of the nation was not all that their propaganda purported’ (McClellan 1996: 61).

It is in moments like these, when the confidence in the Grand Narrative momentarily weakens, that in Amharic texts surfaces what Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis calls ‘angst toward ‘Otherness’’ (2010a: 48). The Grand Narrative offered a single, totalising explanation for all matters of religion, politics, history and identity, and the lack of equally-powerful worldviews made Ethiopian intellectuals apprehensive whenever ‘other’ perspectives had the potential to destabilise, or outright undermine it. As in the case of Elizabeth Wolde Giorgis, historians use strong terms like ‘angst’, ‘anguish’ and ‘anxiety’ to describe the intellectuals’ reaction at the prospect that the Grand Narrative could turn out to be invalid. Bahru sees post-1941 political thought as characterised by ‘a centralist vision of national integration and a corresponding *anxiety* about the centrifugal tendencies latent in a heterogeneous state like Ethiopia’ (2008: 86-87)²¹⁴. In most cases, such anxiety was repressed, but the next chapter shows that in some cases it did lead to the surfacing of influential counter-narratives. For the Italian occupation, though,

²¹⁴ Emphasis added.

historiography reaffirmed a ‘false sense of national unity and strength’ (McClellan 1996: 59). Internal conflicts were negated and glossed over, and the opportunity to collectively re-discuss the meaning and contradictions of Ethiopian nationhood was intentionally missed. The old definition of national identity was once again imposed upon all Ethiopians in a top-down fashion.

Gərmaččāw’s *Araya* is perhaps the most multi-layered novel on the Italian occupation published in the post-independence period. It goes slightly deeper than other works in its analysis of the occupation, but overall remains within the canon when it comes to how alterity and coloniality are represented. Compared to other post-1941 works, the novel offers a deeper insight on the causes and conduct of the war, mentioning for example that Mussolini decided to invade Ethiopia to alleviate Italy’s economic problems and to relocate poverty-stricken Italians in the new colony. Gərmaččāw, quite daringly, paints Haylā Səlasse’s exile in negative terms, and his characters are critical of the Emperor’s strategic decision to fight the Italians in a frontal battle, thus exposing the Ethiopian army to the destructive firepower of Italian airplanes, rather than opting for guerrilla operations (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 284-5). The narration is equally forthright when describing the confusion, fear and suffering of the soldiers retreating from Mayčāw (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 175). Nevertheless, the war is still depicted as a victory of Ethiopia’s national values. The Italian aggression provoked a surge of patriotic spirit and a new determination to defend the homeland. For years, *Araya* thinks, Ethiopians had been too lazy to actively commit to the improvement of their country. The invasion alerted the Ethiopian people and gave them a purpose, and for this reason it is almost welcomed by *Araya*. In the novel, the conflict with the Italians revived Ethiopia’s identity and reactivated Ethiopia’s nationhood²¹⁵.

Araya perceptively notes that such nationhood is not a preordained God-sent gift, but needs to be actively kept alive and constantly reenergised. *Araya* reasons that ‘though the Ethiopian people lived under a single state, they still lacked mutual agreement due to cultural variations emanating from tribal and particular religious differences’ (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 300, quoted in Zelealem 1990: 50). And he goes on acknowledging the internal power relation in the

²¹⁵ Richard Reid has underlined how warfare and conflict are perceived by Ethiopians as key elements of the country’s history (2006: 90). Much more than in other countries in Africa, in Ethiopia ‘much historical identity has been forged through war’ (2006: 92) informing ‘the manner in which people define themselves’ (2006: 92). In Ethiopian historiography, ‘in a sense, the state was war’ (2006: 96). The idea of war as the highest manifestation of Ethiopian national values and spirit is typical of the Ethiopian royal chronicles – and *Araya* appears to follow that tradition. More precisely, *Araya* is, at the same time, a consolidation and a weakening of this myth. The war in the novel does not lead to a national resurgence, nor does it produce any heroes. In contrast with the warrior-kings of Ethiopia’s past, Haylā Səlasse gave up fighting and abandoned the country. The character of *Araya* is himself an ambiguous war hero. His personality is shaped by his role in the resistance, but also and more importantly, by his education in France. He retires to private life after the liberation, disappointed that the brave spirit of the Resistance did not lead to any substantial national progress. The war had cancelled the laziness and numbness of the Ethiopian spirit, but after the war the people stopped being concerned about the nation and its values once again. *Araya* can thus be interpreted as a contemporary and pessimistic reinterpretation of the heroic myth in Ethiopian history.

country between *habäša* and non-*habäša*: ‘the people who had been ruled by our fathers as serfs and slaves, when they see us confronted with problems might welcome the enemy and give in to its propaganda’ (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 300, quoted in Zelealem 1990: 51). Of all the fictional and non-fictional texts analysed for this thesis, this is the closest a post-war author went in raising the issue of the legacy of interethnic bitterness in the country. This, together with the criticism of the Emperor’s choices during the invasion, differentiates *Araya* from the rest of post-1941 intellectual production. Despite these slight deviations from the Grand Narrative, Araya’s solution is the usual one, the same endorsed by Haylä Səlasse: a more determined assimilationist effort. Educational policies, Araya believes, would create a homogeneous national culture, thus overcoming religious and ethnic sectionalism (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 113). The grievances of those ‘people who had been ruled by our fathers as serfs and slaves’ are seen as elements of danger to quash, not as legitimate political positions to listen to. The accusation of cowardice and moral corruptness return in the way collaborators are characterised. Araya thinks that their pro-Italian stance was motivated by ‘fear, ignorance, or sheer immorality’ (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 297). The construction of alterity remains in the novel highly problematic. Among the hardships faced by Ethiopian soldiers in their ruinous retreat from Mayčāw, Gərmaččāw describes the attacks of two Wällo Oromo groups, the Rayya and the Azäbo:

While the [Italian] planes were roaring and frightening the heavens, the Rayya and the Azäbo concealed behind every bush and boulder, had surrounded and were harrying [some] of the wayfarers like hyenas and wolves. Slathered with butter, clad in kilt-like garments [*gəldəm*], wearing their hair in wild shocks and armed with swords, they would unexpectedly appear from behind bushes and rocks. Shouting ‘capitulate, capitulate! Surrender your rifle! It’s better than death! Don’t perish!’. In a flash they struck at random like hawks, like hungry wolves, snatching rifles here, firing there, evirating corpses another place (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 175, quoted in Kane 159-160)²¹⁶

The repeated comparisons with ferocious wild animals (hyenas, wolves, hawks) contribute to characterise the Raya and Azebo as savage and barbaric tribes. They materialise in the narration out of nowhere, without a previous history; no mention is made of their motivation and of the cultural and political context in which their decision to assault the Ethiopian army was taken. The Rayya and Azäbo are a radical opposite of the author’s self; they act in ways that are incomprehensible and no dialogue is possible with them. Although *Araya* represents the Italian

²¹⁶ Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam’s 1973 *Baša Keṭaw* narrates, like *Araya*, how the retreating Ethiopian army was attacked by local population. Hostile inhabitants are, again like in *Araya*, otherised in a very pejorative way. They are described as ‘people with a slender, erect physical stature, having long hair smeared with excessive butter’ (Zelealem 1990: 41).

occupation from a refreshingly broad and multi-layered perspective, it presents cultural alterity according to the prevailing Grand Narrative models.

Ethiopia as the ‘smallest’ of the ‘big’ nations

Ethiopian thinkers thought of *zämänawinnät* as a process distinct and separated from colonialism. The notion of *zämänawinnät* was based on the careful scrutiny of the Western system, from which only selected elements would have to be borrowed. Some aspects of Western society were firmly rebuffed, for example what Ethiopian writers saw as Western materialism, loose morality and individualism. Western imperialism, though, was never listed among the elements to reject. The acolonial modernity envisioned by Ethiopian intellectuals manifested itself in two interlinked tendencies. Firstly, Ethiopian intellectuals did not question or analyse European colonialism, and secondly they downplayed their own relationship with colonialism. They did not see any incongruity between the modernity they praised in European countries, and the condemnation of the colonial aggressions suffered by Ethiopia. Colonialism is decried in the case of the Italian attacks against Ethiopia, but largely ignored when it comes to other African (or Asian) states, whose experiences almost never resonate in the Ethiopian intellectual output up until the late 1950s. Whenever colonialism is discussed, Ethiopian writers defended the assumption that ‘big nations’ had the duty to help ‘small nations’ in the path to development. The distinction between civilised, developed nations and uncivilised, undeveloped nations was similarly taken for granted. The few critical voices that questioned the merits of colonialism mostly focused on European economic exploitation. Instead of assisting the economic development of their colonies, European powers pillaged their resources for the benefit of the mother country. While criticising the hypocrisy of colonial propaganda, this argument relies on the assumption that an altruistic, selfless type of colonialism was possible. Even more problematically, the ways in which race and racism underpinned the European colonial enterprise are left out of the analytical picture. The articulation of the difference between the West and the non-West was then based on ‘an acknowledgement of marginality [in relation to the West], but one that fell short from problematizing the body of thought that qualified and authorized those categories of knowledge that privileged the West and denied the plurality and historicity of alterities’ (Elizabeth 2010a: 92). The ideological links between European modernity, colonialism and Eurocentrism remained unexplored.

Leaving this analytical gap open was in line with the political objectives of the Ethiopian ruling elite, whose nationalism aimed at claiming for Ethiopia a status equal to Western powers. In order to command international authority, the Ethiopian state had to distinguish itself from the rest of Africa. The Italian invasions were thus presented as something different than European colonial conquest in Africa, the difference being that Ethiopia was one of the world’s great civilisations, a biblical country, the birthplace of humanity and, like the

great powers, a member of the League of Nations. Italy, so went the argument put forward by Ethiopian cultural and political leaders, had dared attacking a nation her equal. It was then possible to condemn the Italian aggression while remaining silent on European colonialism on the grounds that Ethiopia, contrary to other nations, did not deserve to be colonised because of its historical and cultural standing. Of course, the Ethiopian elites had imperialist plans of their own in the Horn and were quite receptive of pro-colonial narratives, as long as they could use them to buttress their own expansionist ambitions.

The Grand Narrative's acoloniality was based on a constitutive contradiction. On the one hand, Ethiopian intellectuals, particularly before the Italian invasion, acknowledged the existence of a lag in development between Ethiopia and the West. The idea that Ethiopia was a 'small nation' compared to the 'big nations' in the West was a staple mark of pre-1936 intellectual production. Ethiopia was backward, pro-*zāmānawinnāt* thinkers agreed, and had to catch up with Western nations. On the other hand, this backwardness was just considered the contingent, accidental product of a series of unlucky circumstances, for example Ethiopia's geographic isolation, or the petty rivalries dividing the Ethiopian elite, or the wars of aggression waged by hostile surrounding countries. Never was Ethiopian culture considered intrinsically inferior. Quite the opposite, Ethiopia's rightful place, in virtue of its antiquity and past glories, was thought to be among the world's great powers. The Adwa victory was seen to confirm that Ethiopia had a destiny of modernity and progress alike that of European nations. The Europhilia characterising the thought of first- and second-generation intellectuals was based on the conception that Ethiopia could borrow from Europe on equal terms²¹⁷. The self-assurance inspired by Adwa, then, led to consider Ethiopia's perceived backwardness a fortuitous historical anomaly that the passing of time and the benevolent actions of the Emperor would swiftly rectify. Such was the solution proposed by the ruling elites to reconcile historical self-entitlement and lacklustre economic present, and for many years the Grand Narrative was successful in containing centrifugal ideological tendencies. The cracks opened in the late 1950s, when a slow and gradual progress of 'recolonisation' of the Grand Narrative allowed the counter-historiographies to come to the surface and gain an unprecedented visibility.

²¹⁷ The same applied to the Japanisers, whose main assumption was that Ethiopia and Japan were comparable countries and had the same history. Bahru maintains that this argument was based on a major over-estimation of Ethiopia's economic and socio-political standing (2008: 208-210).

Chapter 6 – Recolonising the Grand Narrative

The counter-historiographies emerge to the surface

We are to know
[...]
Of the days when we tottered and paddled on our fours
While our little legs were yet playing us false
Of the songs of the past our elders taught us
The songs when time was of little or of no concern
When these giant mountains swallowed in
The deaf pride of antiquity
And frowned away at the winds of change:
[...]
We, whose wake is rooted
In the moaning groins of yesteryears
In the obsessive mist of past ballads
We, the strange fruits of present chaos
Whose dreams are occupied
In tales of historica etiopics (Şägaye 1965: 56-57)

Deceived by ‘the songs our elders taught us’, holding on to the ‘deaf pride of antiquity’, their dreams ‘occupied in the tales of historica etiopics’, their thoughts rooted ‘in the obsessive mist of past ballads’: Şägaye’s 1965 *Also of Etiopics* vividly depicts and harshly condemns the intellectuals’ empty fervour for the Grand Narrative. What the old generation has transmitted to Şägaye’s own generation are nothing but ‘false songs’, ‘tales’, ‘ballads’ of a romanticised past. In these tales, Şägaye’s contemporaries took refuge, frightened by the ‘winds of change’ and refusing to assess the present for what it is. Absorbed in the glories of the past, hardened in their stubborn pride, Ethiopian thinkers removed themselves from the social reality around them. The whole poem is an angry accusation of failure against the Ethiopian educated elites, and Şägaye makes it clear that the unrealistic attachment to the Grand Narrative is the main reason for the intellectuals’ *käšäfa*.

The ‘historiography of dissent’²¹⁸ emerged to the surface starting from the mid-1960s (Triulzi 2002: 283), challenging the hegemony of the Grand Narrative. Since the very beginning of the century, Ethiopian intellectuals had feared that their country was declining or stagnating instead of progressing, and in various moments they had been struck by what they saw as their

²¹⁸ Like chapter 2, this chapter also uses the terms ‘counter-historiographies’ and ‘counter-narratives’.

country's profound weakness. They had always repressed these feelings, confident, or, in the most prudent cases just hopeful, that the Grand Narrative was right and things would get better. The desired *zāmānawinnāt*, though, did not concretise or, in the areas where it did concretise, it was not like the intellectuals had imagined it. The state was reinforced, but in ways that suffocated individual freedoms. The spreading of *zāmānawi* customs and lifestyle had brought ethical disorientation and, in the view of many intellectuals, widespread immorality. New technologies and infrastructures were introduced, but progress in this area was much more modest than initially envisioned. As for the spread of knowledge, educational reform was inching forward very slowly, and in ways that many thinkers disapproved of. It also became clear that, while the Ethiopian ruling class was claiming that Ethiopia was like Western powers, at least in potency, Western countries did not consider Ethiopia one of them. Ethiopians were systematically 'otherised', if not explicitly discriminated against by Western racism.

From the mid-1960s, feelings of failure and stagnation started being acknowledged more openly than before, although still very sporadically and hesitantly. Even if for the most part it kept being suppressed, the counter-historiography of decline, which had always accompanied the Grand Narrative, now emerged to the surface more frequently. Admitting Ethiopia's weakness led, as a first effect, to a nuancing down of the Grand Narrative's external border. Ethiopia, in its backwardness, was not so different from other African countries, Ethiopian intellectuals reasoned. Once *habāša* superiority was contested and colonial discrimination denounced, a second step was to question the Grand Narrative's internal border, which was premised on the idea of a civilisational divide between *habāša* and non-*habāša* people. The counter-narratives put forward by people relegated at the periphery of the Ethiopian state vehemently counteracted the exceptionalism characterising imperial political thought. Although in different degrees, intellectuals from the centre started acknowledging a plurality of cultural frontier zones, which translated in a more layered and pluralistic conception of otherness. Domestic and international power relations, too, gained an increased analytical prominence. The colonial started being faced and explicitly articulated, a process that this chapter refers to as the 'recolonisation' of Ethiopian political thought.

The intellectuals under analysis in this thesis only partly contributed to the historiographies of dissent and to the recolonisation of the Grand Narrative. For the most part, it was fourth-generation students who took it upon themselves to deconstruct the Grand Narrative and who actively committed to finding alternatives to it. And yet, this chapter wants to attenuate the verdict of failure discussed in chapter 4 in relation to first-, second-, and third-generation intellectuals. Many third-generation writers, and even some second-generation ones, did put the Grand Narrative into discussion, albeit tentatively, and worked towards its recolonisation. In some areas, their contribution was not insignificant, for example in pushing for a more proactive identification of Ethiopia with Sub-Saharan Africa. In some other areas, they did not commit at

all, for example in the national question, which was almost exclusively raised by the students. Putting some aspects of the Grand Narrative into discussion, though, did not mean that the old intelligentsia intended to discard the Grand Narrative altogether. Instead, more often than not, second- and third-generation intellectuals renegotiated the Grand Narrative with the purpose of reenergising it and ultimately reinforcing it. This is particularly true, as we shall see, for the case of Pan-Africanism, which gave the Ethiopian intellectual elites the chance to revitalise the old notion of Ethiopia's primacy in the new context of independent Africa.

Each facet of the Grand Narrative's acoloniality was challenged separately, but the recolonisation was uneven. Among the four components examined in the last chapter, the national question was definitely the one that, starting from the late 1960s to the present day, has been more extensively and fiercely debated. In this sphere, the counter-narratives have gained in time an authority that had profound impacts not only on historiography, but also on the very make-up of the Ethiopian state. The relationship of Ethiopia with Sub-Saharan Africa comes second. Many Ethiopian intellectuals, including some second- and third-generation ones, contributed to the 'Africanisation' of Ethiopian self-perceptions. Yet, throughout the period under consideration and even nowadays, feelings of *habäša* exceptionalism vis-à-vis other African people remain strong, and whenever Pan-Africanism is embraced, it is often conceived in hierarchical terms with Ethiopia ahead of other African countries. Thirdly, Adwa, the seemingly unshakable myth of origin of the Ethiopian nation-state, was accused of injecting the Ethiopian elites with an exaggerated cultural confidence. Although the Grand Narrative's brand of nationalism keeps dominating the way the battle is remembered, this new wave of criticism, first articulated in the years after the 1941 liberation, has become increasingly common. A comprehensive re-examination is still lacking, finally, when it comes to the fourth facet of the Grand Narrative's acoloniality, the Italian occupation. There has not been an all-round reappraisal of the fascist years and their impact, and acolonial discursive modes still underpin the way the period is remembered.

Deconstructing the myth of Adwa

Although the anniversary of Adwa is still widely celebrated throughout Ethiopia every year, and although the victory keeps inspiring national pride, historians and intellectuals have gradually begun to question its practical results. 'In the end', Bahru reflects, 'the balance-sheet may not have been in Ethiopia's favour' (1991: 84). The general perception in historiography is that the ruling elite did not manage to capitalise on the victory. Adwa opened great possibilities for Ethiopia, but these were wasted because of the very same nationalism the battle inspired. Self-assured and poised, the country's leaders 'did not consider it necessary to build up an arm industry, with all the modernization and reorganization of society that such an effort would involve', especially because 'the ease with which Mənilək had obtained weapons led Ethiopians

to conclude that the nation would always be able to purchase war supplies from eager salesmen' (Marcus 1975: 5). According to Levine,

Adwa may have served to give Ethiopians a false sense of confidence about their position in the modern world. In showing themselves and the world that they could defeat a European invader with their own resources, the 1896 campaign may have led them to think that their traditional resources could be adequate in an era in which war would be waged with tanks and airplanes (1996: 2).

Such overconfidence, according to historians, had profound impacts on Ethiopian political thought (McClellan 1996: 59). The 'false sense of confidence' Levine speaks about led to the 'softening of the reformist determination' and to the consequent 'deferment of necessary reforms' (Messay 1999: 274-275). The same sense of self-sufficiency allowed intellectuals to air modernising views without ever concretising them in a comprehensive set of practical measures. From this point of view, the pride and spirited nationalism inspired by Adwa (Bahru 1991: 84) could have contributed to what was considered to be, as seen in previous chapters, the limited historical impact, in terms of systemic reforms, of the intellectuals' theoretical steadfastness to change. Although advocating change on paper, their ideological commitment never turned into political activism. Proposals could remain vague and idealistic since Adwa allowed seeing Ethiopia, after all, as already successful and self-reliant²¹⁹. A second, major effect of the 'false sense of confidence' generated by Adwa was the widespread downplaying of the dangers of a second Italian invasion. Adwa had been such a resounding victory that beating the Italians a second time, it was assumed, would be equally easy (McClellan 1996: 59-60). Both on *Bərhanənnā Sālam* and in the creative output of the members of the *YäHagār Fəḳər Mahbär*²²⁰, the memory of Adwa was called upon to ridicule the imminent Italian invasion, and express faith in a second Ethiopian triumph.

The belief, boosted by Adwa, in Ethiopian exceptionalism made it all the more disappointing for the intellectuals to look at Ethiopia's lack of progress. The promise of Adwa was since the beginning intertwined with a feeling of inexplicable and unmerited decadence. The perceived decline was believed to be reversible, a temporary misfortune that did not invalidate Ethiopia's claim to be among the world's greatest nations. This assumption, though, did not solve the dissonance between the destiny of greatness foreboded by the Grand Narrative and the reality of the country's underdevelopment. A new counter-historiography emerged,

²¹⁹ From this point of view, the black nationalist reverence for Ethiopia as the symbolic Motherland of all Africans (not to mention the more explicitly religious Rastafari veneration of Ethiopia as the 'African Zion' and of Haylā Səlassē as the new Christ) gave even more legitimacy to the exceptionalism of the Grand Narrative.

²²⁰ For example, Yoftahe Nəgusē's *Əlḳeṭru Gobäz Ayyän* (1935/36, for a discussion on how to translate the title see Kane 1975: 12) and Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannēs's two poems *Yäwänd Ləjj Kurat Səlä Hagār Mämot* ('A man's pride is to die for his country', 1934/35) and *Jägəna Säw Tägaday Lätälatu Almot Bay* ('The brave man fights on, telling his enemy he will not be killed', 1935/36).

sceptical of the Grand Narrative's tales of Ethiopia's imminent success. Such counter-historiography suggested that Adwa marked Ethiopia's separate decline, rather than its separate glory. It deconstructed Adwa's mythical status in Ethiopian history arguing that Adwa-inspired nationalism precluded a realistic assessment of the country's condition and discouraged a committed effort to strengthen Ethiopia's military, political and diplomatic position.

This counter-historiography of decline, although born in the immediate aftermath of the Adwa victory, was never comprehensively articulated in the works of the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals. Censorship prevented discussing Ethiopia's progress in disenchanted terms, but more important than the hindrance of censorship was the intellectuals' reluctance to abandon the reassuring optimism of the Grand Narrative. Feelings of disillusionment were immediately suppressed and, in the production of Ethiopian intellectuals, only surfaced sporadically, in momentary outbursts of frustration. *Bərhanənnā Sālam* offers some examples. On the 23rd of December 1926, *Blatta* Däressa Amānte laments Ethiopia's lack of progress. Adwa, he says, should have inspired the Ethiopians to build more factories, like Japan did, but instead of living up to the promises of Adwa, Ethiopia was wasting the opportunity, with year after year of stagnation (*BS* 23/12/1936)²²¹. In his 1922 *YäItyopyya Həzb Tarik, Aläḳa* Tayyā too bemoans Ethiopia's fall from grace: 'such a beautiful country and an object of admiration for foreigners has now become the citadel of bloodshed, injustice, evil and shame because her unity has been destroyed through discord' (Hudson and Tekeste 1987: 96). In his *Aṭe Məniləkənnā Ityopyya*, Gäbrä-Həywät Baykādañ unfavourably compares Ethiopia with British Sudan and Italian Eritrea (1912: 139); but some of his contemporaries went even further, and momentarily flirted with the idea that Ethiopia would benefit from being colonised. In 1925, Wärḳəñāh Əṣāte confessed to British Foreign Office executives his frustration at the Orthodox Church's opposition to the reforms he and Täfäri were attempting to implement, and proposed to resolve the standoff by devolving part of Ethiopia's sovereignty to the League of Nations. A temporary mandate over the country exercised by two or three powers, Wärḳəñāh reasoned, could provide the initial push Ethiopia needed to start her process of modernisation (Bahru 2002: 104-105). In his unpublished autobiography (written after the Italian occupation), Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam ventures even further:

Sometimes, I ask myself, would it have been better if the civilized nations had colonized us for a short period of time? The British had that opportunity twice [1868 and 1941]. But, because they were not prepared to help, they left the country without setting up anything (quoted in Bahru 2002: 100).

²²¹ Caulk (1978) considers Däressa Amānte the major ideological heir of Gäbrä-Həywät Baykādañ. He argues that Däressa's articles in *Bərhanənnā Sālam* 'are perhaps the most interesting contributions to reformist thought between the publication of Gebre Heywet's second essay in 1924 and the Italian occupation' (1978: 578). For more information see Bahru (2002: 74-75) and Alemayehu (2003).

This was, for Täklä-Hawaryat, just a transitory thought, which he allowed himself to express only in the confessional, private context of his autobiographical writing. Considering his implacable opposition to the Italian occupation, this passage ‘is a measure of [Täklä-Hawaryat’s] disenchantment with the country’s state of affairs’ (Bahru 2002: 100). Still, the *nonchalance* with which Täklä-Hawaryat fantasises about a British-colonised Ethiopia is indicative of the distance between Ethiopian political thought and some coeval developments in Pan-African and black nationalist philosophies.

The fact that Täklä-Hawaryat expresses this view after the Italian occupation is significant. The fascist conquest inflicted a significant blow to the self-assurance of the post-Adwa years. The impacts of the occupation were rarely discussed in the open, and the government tried to minimise the ‘Italian incident’ as much as possible. But some intellectuals did reflect, albeit *in passim*, on how the Italian years had made apparent Ethiopia’s political, military and economic weakness. ‘The reigns of Emperors Tewodros, Yohannes and Menelik have passed in vain’, declared a disheartened Kābbādä Mikael in his *Japan Əndāmən Säläṭṭānāčč*. ‘If Ethiopia had worked hard [in adopting European ways] in those years’, he reasons, ‘she would have averted the recent Fascist invasion’ (quoted in Bahru 2008: 199). Both Gərmaččāw Täklä-Hawaryat’s *Araya* and Asäffa Gäbrä-Maryam’s *Əndəwawṭačč Kərračč* (‘She went out and never came back’, 1953/54) strongly criticise of the excess of confidence of the Ethiopian political elites before the Italian invasion. They present this complacency and hollow pride as one of the main causes of the Ethiopian capitulation at Mayčāw. In *Araya*, Ato Alāmayāhu, a veteran of Adwa, reacts with smugness at the news, in 1935, that the Italians were about to invade Ethiopia a second time. He reminds Araya that at Adwa ‘we defeated the Italians armed only with our sticks and spears’ (Gərmaččāw 1948/49: 228), but Araya is not so optimistic. He points instead at the differences in preparation and organisation between the two armies, worrying in particular about the Italian war planes, whose presence, he forecasts²²², could be decisive. Ato Alāmayāhu and his boastings about Ethiopia’s military invincibility, of course, are later proven wrong (Zealelem 1990: 27-28). Asäffa Gäbrä-Maryam is even harsher with the old generations. Zälläka, the novel’s protagonist, blames his father and father-in-law, two Adwa veterans, for their arrogance. ‘They used to tell us that fighting against the Italians was as simple as cutting pumpkins into parts’, accuses Zälläka (1953/54: 33). His generational peers have inherited, without questioning it, the same self-assuredness, and are for Zälläka as responsible for Ethiopia’s defeat as their fathers. Neither realised that Ethiopia in 1935 was unprepared, underequipped and badly organised. The government indulged in the feeling of Adwa’s nationalist grandeur, failing to realistically assess the threat, and Zälläka condemns it in no ambiguous terms: ‘a people or government that fails to closely follow and trace the hourly,

²²² Of course it was easy for Gərmaččāw, who wrote the novel in the late 1940s, to present Araya as a shrewd political analyst by making him predict future events exactly as Gərmaččāw knew they happened in reality.

daily, monthly and yearly plan of his neighbour, let alone that of his enemy, cannot claim to be a nation or a government' (1953/54: 34)²²³.

In conclusion, the Adwa victory both defined the modern version of the Grand Narrative and, at the same time, gave birth to a counter-historiography that questioned the Grand Narrative's main assumptions. The first component of the Grand Narrative to be challenged was precisely its constitutive myth: that the Adwa victory signified for Ethiopia a future of progress and greatness²²⁴. Were progress and greatness really achievable for Ethiopia? Was the nationalism inspired by Adwa based on an idealised, unrealistic appraisal of Ethiopia's international position? Doubts were raised as early as the 1900s on the merits of Ethiopia's non-colonised status. Was Ethiopia's acoloniality really the best solution for the country? Would it have been more profitable for the country to have a more direct relationship with colonialism? The observation that Ethiopia, for all its self-professed exceptionalism vis-à-vis the rest of Africa, was actually much more backward than other African colonial states, would come back over and over again in the production of the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals (Bahru 1991: 84). Some Ethiopian intellectuals were, at least in certain moments, uncomfortable with the nationalist overconfidence of the Grand Narrative and its use of the battle of Adwa as proof of Ethiopia's exceptionalism. In recent years, historians have come as far as denying the fact, for many self-evident, that the victory at Adwa spared Ethiopia from European colonialism. In 1990, as we shall see in the next paragraph, Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa argued that European powers colonised Ethiopia by proxy, with Mənilək acting as their agent. Radically departing from the Grand Narrative's acoloniality, historians who tackled the 'national question' argued that the colonial is a pivotal, albeit overlooked, analytical dimension to understand Ethiopian history.

The national question

From the 1960s onwards, the Grand Narrative has received much criticism for acting as the chief legitimating tool of Haylā Səlasse's oppressive centralist regime. The first signs that Ethiopia's educated elites were becoming uncomfortable with state-sponsored ideas of national identity appeared towards the second half of the 1960s. A poem provocatively titled *Man Näw Ityopiya*? ('Who is an Ethiopian?') written by Ibsa Gutama, an Oromo student, was recited at University Day in 1966, and a book by the same name appeared in 1971 by Tadälä Gäbrä-Həywät. The definition of Ethiopianness was debated in a variety of media and meetings, and students 'seemed to grab every opportunity to pose the question "Who is an Ethiopian?"' (Markakis 2011: 164). The 'national question' (also called 'nationalities issue'), meaning the

²²³ Asäffa/Zälläka predictably absolves the Emperor, saying he tried his best to make the necessary preparations ahead of time, but his government did not support him (Zealelem 1990: 38).

²²⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the controversial legacy of Adwa, see Triulzi (2003).

problems related to political and economic integration of different groups within the state, began being gradually addressed starting from the late 1960s.

Protagonists of the new debate were fourth-generation students. Older elites rarely, if ever, questioned the merits of Haylä Səlasse's monocultural model of nationhood, although some belatedly jumped on the revolutionary wagon in the prelude of the Revolution or in its immediate aftermath. The first play Təsfaye Gəssəssā directed after the Revolution (in September/October 1974), for instance, was a musical whose title referenced back to Ibsa Gutama and resurrected the question *Man nəw Ityopiyawi?* (Molvaer 1997a: 239)²²⁵. These moments of synergy between generations, though, were rare. It was almost exclusively at the hands of the fourth generation that the Grand Narrative's pillar notion of national unity was defied and a more forthright discussion over Ethiopia's multicultural make-up was initiated. The nationalities issue raised questions over economic and administrative policy-making, but was also, at its core, a problem in political theory, related to notions of interethnic coexistence and tolerance, to the institutional representation of various social groups within the state, and to the right to cultural expression. The fact that second- and third-generation voices are absent from the debate points once again at the old elites' 'inability or unwillingness' to put the Grand Narrative's acoloniality into discussion. Questioning the taboo of national unity, not to mention raising the incendiary issue of secessionism, meant venturing in an uncharted philosophical terrain, while the Grand Narrative's solutions had the double advantage of a comfortable familiarity and time-tested explanatory power.

Although the first three generations of intellectuals did not participate in the deconstruction of the 'Greater Ethiopia' type of nationalism, the monarchy-sponsored idea of nationhood, is, of all the elements of the Grand Narrative, the one that has been more intensely contested and recolonised. The counter-historiographies and oppositional discourses first put forward by fourth-generation students proved so influential in the past fifty years and had political impacts so profound that it is now impossible to study Ethiopian history without taking them into account. The historical circumstances and ideological influences leading to the emergence of the nationalities issue among fourth-generation students have been extensively analysed (Keller 1981, Balsvik 1985: 278, Amanuel 1993, Vaughan 2003: 138-145, Bahru 2014: 187-228), and the subsequent development of different forms of ethnic consciousness in Ethiopia has similarly received ample scholarly coverage²²⁶. I will now offer a brief survey of

²²⁵ The musical ran for about one month, and, by its author's own admission, was a 'flop, a miserable failure'. Təsfaye received a lot of criticism, which, in his interview with Molvaer, he admitted was well deserved. The musical, Təsfaye describes, argued that Ethiopia 'should not go to the East or the West for ideas but develop its own philosophy: Ethiopia First' (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 239).

²²⁶ The study of ethnicity in the Ethiopian context is chiefly linked to the work of Jon Abbink (1995, 1997, 2006 and 2011). Other important works on the theme are Young (1996a), Merera (2002), Pausewang, Tronvoll and Aalen (2002), Vaughan & Tronvoll (2003), Alem (2004), Assefa (2006), Aalen (2011), Vaughan (2011), Van Der Beken (2012), Smith (2013), Asnake (2013).

these developments, assessing to what extent the counter-historiographies were successful in recolonising the Grand Narrative.

In 1969, an undergraduate student, Walälləñ Mäkönnən²²⁷, wrote an article in which the mythology of imperial unity was unceremoniously rejected in its entirety (Vaughan 2003: 137). Before Walälləñ's article, 'there was little to indicate that Ethiopian students were even remotely considering the kind of radical solution that was to be the norm after 1969' (Bahru 2014: 196). Students belonging to different ethnic groups, including Oromos, repeatedly condemned what they called 'sectarian movements', 'tribal feelings' and 'regional ethnocentrism' (Bahru 2014: 196-198), emphasising that class, and not ethnicity, was the primary cause of discrimination within the Ethiopian state. Ibsa Gutama's *Man Näw Ityopiyawi?* asks which ethnic group qualifies to be called Ethiopian, but concludes by expressing dismay at those Ethiopians who invoke regional and ethnic identities in lieu of the pan-Ethiopian one (Bahru 2014: 196). Well into 1968, students made a conscious effort in their writings to counteract the 'perils of ethnicity' (Bahru 2014: 197).

Against this pan-Ethiopian and unionist backdrop, Walälləñ's article came 'like a bolt from the blue' (Bahru 2014: 199) and has now become rightfully famous as a turning point in the history of Ethiopian political thought. The imperial idea of nationhood, Walälləñ accuses, is restrictively based on 'Amhara-Tigre supremacy', and is therefore far from being inclusive. What the state presents as 'Ethiopian national culture' is, in reality, only Amhara.

Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian religion is? Ask anybody what the national dress is? It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigre!! To be a 'genuine Ethiopian' one has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara-Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity, and to wear the Amhara-Tigre Shamma²²⁸ in international conferences. In some cases to be an 'Ethiopian' you will even have to change your name. In short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression) (Walleligne 1969: 4).

Walälləñ's conclusion was, at the time, momentous and truly radical:

²²⁷ Walälləñ Mäkönnən (ca. 1940-1972) was one of the leaders of the Ethiopian Student Movement. He was associated to the 'Crocs', short for 'Crocodies', students who studied Marxist revolutionary literature. He actively contributed to the student newspaper *Struggle*. In 1969, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for stirring up acts of violence and disturbances. He was released due to persistence of students' boycotts, but later imprisoned again for 15 months. He died in 1972 while attempting to hijack an airplane as an act of protest.

²²⁸ A type of cloth.

Ethiopia is not really one nation. It is made up of a dozen nationalities, with their own languages, ways of dressing, history, social organisation and territorial entity. And what else is a nation? Is it not made of a people with a particular tongue, particular ways of dressing, particular history, particular social and economic organisations? Then may I conclude that in Ethiopia there is the Oromo Nation, the Tigray Nation, the Amhara Nation, the Gurage Nation, the Sidama Nation, the Wellamo Nation, the Adere Nation, and however much you may not like it the Somali Nation (Wallelign 1969: 4).

Against the ‘fake nationalism’ of the ruling class (1969: 5), Walällāñ advocates the building of a ‘genuine national state’,

in which all nationalities participate equally in state affairs, [...] where every nationality is given equal opportunity to preserve and develop its language, its music, its history. Is is a state where Amharas, Tigres, Oromos, Aderes, Somalis, Wollamos, Guragis, etc. are treated equally. It is a state where no nation dominates another nation be it economically or culturally (Wallelign 1969: 5).

In challenging the Grand Narrative’s brand of nationalism, a key role was played by the Eritrean struggle for independence, which from its outbreak in 1961 inspired other demands for regional autonomy against what was perceived as Amhara oppression. The political manifestos of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF)²²⁹ aimed from their onset to forcefully overthrow all the Grand Narrative’s claims. While the Grand Narrative’s staunchly-defended dogma of national unity was indifferent to the system of power relations between various cultural groups in the Horn of Africa, these power relations became, in the politics of regional liberation movements as well as in the counter-historiographies associated to them, a central concern. Even more significantly, these power relations were explained as relations of colonial oppression, thus invalidating the Grand Narrative’s exceptionalist picture of Ethiopia’s glorious acoloniality. Colonialism was forcefully brought back into the historiographical framework. The colonisers/colonised dichotomy was used, often rather rigidly, to explain the relationship between Addis Abāba’s ruling elite and Eritrea as a case of ‘black on black colonialism’, and the relationship between Addis Abāba’s ruling elites and the Oromo as a case of ‘internal colonialism’²³⁰.

²²⁹ All these liberation fronts gained prominence in the political scenario of the Horn of Africa in the 1970s.

²³⁰ Alemseged Abbay (2004) gives an insightful historical analysis of the three paths to nation-building pursued by Ethiopia’s political entrepreneurs: the ‘assimilationist’ model of nation-building (imperial Ethiopia), the ‘secessionist’ path (Oromo, Eritrea) and ‘accommodationist’ option (Təgray).

The ELF/EPLF, the OLF and the WSLF were among the most prominent political actors to claim that the nationalities question was not an internal, intra-national Ethiopian affair²³¹. They saw Ethiopia not as a single unitary state, but as a colonial empire, in which one nation subjugated other nations. Their struggle was not, therefore, aimed at carving out of the Ethiopian state an autonomous political space for Eritreans, Oromos or Somalis. Autonomous political spaces for Eritreans, Oromos or Somalis had existed in the past and were only recently seized by the Amhara in their late 19th century imperial expansionism. The armed struggle against Addis Abāba was therefore an anti-colonial one, aimed at regaining the independence lost at the hands of the Amhara (Iyob 1995: 16). The Eritrean case, argued A. M. Babu, was ‘a colonial question, not a secessionist one. Eritrea was colonised by Ethiopia by means of annexation’ (quoted in Iyob 1995: 16). In a memorandum released in 1978, the EPLF explained:

The conditions and tactics under which Eritrea was put under Ethiopian colonialism may perhaps differ in form from those which brought it under Italian and British colonialism. [...] Nevertheless, since it was an act of annexation committed against Eritrea and its people in the era of imperialist domination of the world under the auspices of the leading imperialist power, the U.S., to serve the geographic and strategic interests of monopoly capital and the expansionist interests of the Ethiopian ruling classes in Eritrea, it is essentially a colonial relationship (quoted in Okbazghi 1987: 644-645).

Eritrean historians reviled the Grand Narrative’s claims to antiquity. In its 1977 political programme, the EPLF accused the Grand Narrative to be the instrument of the Ethiopian ruling elite’s expansionist ambitions in the Horn:

There is a legendary history of ‘3,000 years’ which Ethiopian feudalists and rulers have fabricated to expand their interests. The principal objective of the Amhara feudalists in concocting this tale is the realization of their expansionist ambitions: to put a large country under this dictatorship through the claim of ‘3,000 years’ (EPLF 1977: 1–2).

Oromo nationalism moved from similar premises. The OLF stated in his manifesto:

At no time before the conquest by Menelik was the present day Ethiopia a single country. What existed were independent polities. [...] The official Ethiopian history that [...] presents Menelik’s era as ‘the unification of Ethiopia’ is a fabrication, pure and simple. As in the rest of colonial Africa, the Oromo and other southern peoples were

²³¹ Only a very general sketch of the history of these movements is given here. For more information on the TPLF and EPLF/ELF, see Poscia (1989), Connell (1993), Iyob (1995), Young (1996b and 1997), Alemseged (1998), Medhane (1999), Hammond (1999), Gaim (2008), Aregawi (2009). For more information on the OLF, see Keller (1995), Baxter, Hultin & Triulzi (1996) and Asafa (1998). On the WSLF, see Asnake (2013) and Hagmann (2014).

subjugated, their peace, their cultural identities and human dignity deprived (OLF Foreign Relations Committee 1999: 8-9).

As these examples show, the shift from the Grand Narrative to the counter-historiographies was hinged on the dimension of the colonial. Absent in the Grand Narrative, the colonial became a pervasive presence in the counter-historiographies. This became evident in Oromo historiography²³², which has offered, together with Eritrean historiography²³³, the most systematic and voluminous rebuttal of the Grand Narrative. Starting from Bonnie K. Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa's 1990 *The Invention of Ethiopia*, the already-existing notion of 'internal colonialism' was further amplified by Oromo historians into the paradigm of 'dependent colonialism'. Mənilək's territorial expansion was interpreted as a process of colonial conquest and subjugation carried out on behalf of European powers, who, by enlisting Mənilək as their subordinate agent in the Horn, managed to achieve complete dominance in the region without committing their own military resources. Manipulated by Western foreign advisors, the Ethiopian elites submitted to Europe's capitalist and financial penetration. Ethiopia was therefore not any different from other African colonial states, created ('invented') *ex novo* at the end of the 19th century. Ethiopia, Holcomb and Sisai argued, was no older than a hundred years; the Grand Narrative's rhetoric of three thousand years was just a ludicrous tale²³⁴. The theory of internal colonialism remains a pillar of Oromo studies, as a cursory look to any issue of the *Journal of Oromo Studies* readily demonstrates²³⁵. Scholars in the field draw parallels between the experiences of the southern people of Ethiopia and those of other African and Asian formerly colonised people, referring to the scholarly literature on European imperialism as well as borrowing from the lexicon of postcolonial theory.

Whether these new counter-historiographies managed to overcome the rhetoric strategies of the Grand Narrative, this is more dubious. They constructed rival identities and legitimised themselves with the same tools used by the Great Tradition: antiquity, unity,

²³² The two, now classic, scholarly works that pioneered nationalist Oromo historiography are Mohammed Hassen (1990) and Asafa Jalata (1993).

²³³ Amare Tekle, to make an example from Eritrean historiography, denounces the 'colossal myth' of the Grand Narrative in the following terms: 'For almost a century, and particularly after World War II, Ethiopia has been the beneficiary of a colossal myth. Historians, politicians, adventurers and 'experts' have heedlessly legitimized a romantic but apocryphal epic as history. The saga, interweaving a lot of fiction with a little historical fact, depicts Ethiopia as 3,000 year-old with a glorious history and a rich cultural tradition' (1991: 15). The status and epistemology of Eritrean historiography have been debated, among others, by Gilkes (1991) and Reid (2001).

²³⁴ For a critique of Holcomb and Sisai's *The invention of Ethiopia* see McClellan (1992), Strecker (1994) and Clapham (2002: 43). Common criticisms of Holcomb and Sisai's thesis are, first, that it presents Ethiopian elites as devoid of any agency, and, second, that it rests on very thin evidence, when not in fact relying on an open manipulation of historical data. Strecker (1994) also offers a useful criticism of the choice of the word 'invention' in the title.

authenticity. Oromo historiography, for instance, employed ‘an upside-down version of the old paradigm of exclusion’ and constructed ‘new images of racialized differences and essentialized traits in the region’ (Triulzi 2002: 286). Reacting since their inception against ‘oppressive conditions and denials of identity’, Oromo studies emerged as an ‘intrinsically ideological and emotionally-bound’ scholarly field (Triulzi 2002: 279). Central to the new Oromo scholarship was a ‘forceful ethos’ aimed at giving a sense of identity to uprooted communities (Triulzi 2002: 280). The new identity was constructed by strenuously defending a ‘moral ethnicity which tended to isolate each community within its own cultural and linguistic bounds’ (Triulzi 2002: 280). Just like the Ethiopianist scholarship it aimed to unseat, Oromo nationalist historiography is ‘a modern statement of past glory and, inevitably, a by-product of cultural nationalism’ (2002: 279). The ethnic and social identities of the oppressed are projected back into the past, defined as homogeneous, self-contained and constitutively different from the identity of the Amhara oppressors (Sorenson 1993: 62). Appeals to antiquity are used to legitimise the construction of a separate Oromo identity and to invalidate Addis Abāba’s Pan-Ethiopian claims. The true essence of Oromonness is considered to lie in the attachment to ‘authentic’ and ‘indigenous’ traditions (however they are defined), and in resistance and confrontation against the Ethiopian elites. Those Oromo who collaborated, assimilated, hybridised, converted, or variously departed from what is posited as the group’s original purity, are considered defective in their identity and traitors in their politics. As this brief summary shows, Oromo historiography ‘has taken the Ethiopianist position as its point of departure and, as a consequence, remains derivative, however hostile’ (Crummey 2001: 16). In terms of historical imagination, it is significant ‘that the Ethiopian great tradition has become so entrenched in the construction of legitimating state ideologies in the region that the devotees of a new state [i.e. Oromia] should feel impelled to create a counter-tradition to accompany it’ (Clapham 2002: 59).

Despite these contradictions, with regards to the national question the recolonisation of the Grand Narrative has overall proven very successful, even too successful, perhaps, considering how rushedly the new colonial interpretative framework was used to equate Ethiopian and European colonialism, overlooking local historical nuances. True, the challenge to the Grand Narrative was conducted according to the Grand Narrative’s own rhetorical strategies and legitimising principles. Oromo historians, for example, tended to replicate the Grand Narrative’s essentialist and tranhistorical conception of cultural identity, and its antagonism towards what is constructed as the ‘internal other’ (the non-*habäša* for the Grand Narrative, the *habäša* for Oromo nationalism) – a compact and uniform social bloc antithetic to

²³⁵ One example out of many: Asafa Jalata defines Oromo nationalism ‘a political and cultural movement to liberate Oromos from the Ethiopian colonialism that has kept them in poverty, ignorance and illiteracy for more than a century’ (1998: ix).

‘us’, whose existence is considered a threat to ‘our’ cultural integrity²³⁶. From the point of view of methodological rigour, the counter-historiographies are as problematic as the Grand Narrative, since both are expected to serve, sometimes very transparently, sometimes more discreetly, opposite political agendas. Ethno-nationalist and anti-Ethiopianist historiographies have been criticised for describing power relations in the Horn in a one-dimensional way, positing only two macro-categories of the oppressors and the oppressed²³⁷. However, the very same fact that power relations are brought back at the forefront of historical analysis is in itself an important step forward. The counter-historiographies fragmented the supposedly unified and stable Ethiopian identity, qualifying it from the point of view of class, ethnicity, race and questioning the very idea of nation. The continued discrimination and marginalisation of the state’s cultural and social peripheries was denounced for the first time. The counter-narratives reacted against the otherisation of which non-*habäša* people were victim and against the expansionist territorial ambitions of the Ethiopian elites. They reacted against it with arms as well as with pen, of course. The rebel movements around which the counter-historiographies coalesced challenged the Grand Narrative on the battlefield, and effectively changed the political landscape of the Horn, with the independence of Eritrea and the ethno-federalist reform in Ethiopia. For some Ethiopianist historians, ethno-federalism was perceived as a loss of Ethiopian identity, and indeed it led to a defensive revival of the Grand Narrative and Pan-Ethiopianist arguments. Despite this nostalgic attachment in some circles, the counter-narratives can be said to have effectively delegitimised the Grand Narrative’s unicentrism and opened up the field of Ethiopian and Horn of Africa historiography towards a new inclusivity.

The intellectuals under investigation in this thesis, though, did not take part in the recolonisation of the Grand Narrative’s idea of nationhood, and kept reproducing in their works the Grand Narrative’s conception of alterity as a threat to fight against or assimilate. This is the area, therefore, in which the accusation of conceptual failure levelled against the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals finds more justification. When it comes to Ethiopia’s identification with Africans, diasporic Africans and anti-colonial, anti-racist struggles, though, second- and third-generation intellectuals did commit to changing the Grand Narrative’s

²³⁶ For an example of how Oromo historians responded to this criticism, see Martha Kuwee Kumsa’s 2002 rejoinder to John Sorenson’s 1996 article ‘Learning to be Oromo’.

²³⁷ Bahru judges harshly both the pro-EPLF tradition in Eritrea and the ‘invention of Ethiopia’ tradition, denouncing their ‘explicit political agenda’ and even refusing to qualify their exponents as historians (2000: 15). The rectification of the ‘historiographical injustice perpetrated against the southern people (Oromo included)’, Bahru advocates, has to be attained ‘by a sober and systematic reconstruction of the history of the southern peoples’ and not, like Eritrean and ethno-nationalist historians do, ‘by swinging to the other end of the pendulum and replacing the old mythology by a new one’ (2000: 16). Ezekiel (2002a, then republished in his 2009 edited book) responds in detail to Bahru’s criticism.

exceptionalism, and were in fact quite successful in initiating the ‘Africanisation’ of Ethiopian elite culture (Mazrui 2002: 84)²³⁸.

Africa back on the agenda

The Italian occupation marks the beginning of the Ethiopian intelligentsia’s change of attitude towards the rest of the African continent and its diaspora. In the aftermath of the fascist invasion, Haylä Səlasse and the educated elite, ‘who hitherto took pride in their insulated national identity, began to see themselves in a global racial context [and] worked jointly to undermine Ethiopia’s psychology of insularity’ (Fikru 2005: 231). From the 1935 Italian invasion to the 1939 outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, Ethiopia was internationally isolated. The pre-war confidence that Ethiopia was by historical right one of the world’s great nations clashed against Europe’s indifference to the Ethiopian cause. The Ethiopian elites claimed that their country was, in terms of civilisational hierarchies, on the same level as Western nations, but Western nations made it clear that they did not consider Ethiopia one of them. Ethiopia was ‘other’, non-Western, far away from Europe both in geography and identity. In the hour of need, even those countries with whom Ethiopia was diplomatically close before the Italian invasion – France, the UK, and partly the US and Japan – refused to intervene in Ethiopia’s favour, showing how little strategic importance Ethiopia had for the world’s top power brokers. The contradictions implicit in the general pre-war Europhilia became apparent. What for decades had been conveniently ignored by all the Ethiopian Europhiles, that Western Europe had its own African empires and, League of Nation or not, was not too sensitive to anti-imperialist appeals, could not be anymore minimised. Ethiopia, for all its self-professed exceptionalism, was here categorised as ‘Africa’, with all the negative connotations the term had in European racist thought. The Ethiopian ruling elites had for decades claimed membership to the ‘club’ of the world’s big nations and great civilisations. At the moment, but only momentarily, Ethiopia was, intellectuals conceded, the ‘smallest’ of the big nations and the

²³⁸ At the same time, Mazrui draws attention to the fact that European colonialism imposed around the world a continental categorisation that simplified the rich interconnection of borderland areas. Such categorisation flattened diversity and built administrative and political boundaries that ended up separating peoples with deep historical affinities. Mazrui reflects that ‘cultural similarities between Ethiopia and the rest of black Africa are not any greater than cultural similarities between North Africa and the Arabic Peninsula. Nevertheless, a European decision to make Africa end at the Red Sea has decidedly dis-Africanized the Arabic Peninsula. [...] In any case, the tyranny of the sea is in part a tyranny of European geographical prejudices. Just as European map-makers could decree that on the map Europe was above Africa rather than below (an arbitrary decision in relation to the cosmos), those mapmakers could also dictate that Africa ended at the red Sea instead of at the Persian Gulf. Is it not time that this dual tyranny of the sea and Eurocentric geography was forced to sink to the bottom?’ (2002: 84-85). Ethiopia had a history of fruitful economic and cultural exchange both with what was later categorised as ‘Middle East’ and what was later categorised as ‘Africa’. Once a continental border was drawn in the Red Sea, Ethiopians were forced to conceptualise their culture as either ‘Middle Eastern’ or ‘African’, thus simplifying the intricate network of relationships the country had always had with both cultural areas. A similar argument on the ‘invention’ of Africa has been famously put forward by V. Y. Mudimbe (1988).

most underdeveloped of the developed nations, but its civilisational prestige and historical glories were enough to validate its claim to membership. The world's powerful nations, however, made it now clear that they never saw Ethiopia as one of them. The British, on their part, soon proved that they had imperial ambitions in Ethiopia themselves. Ethiopia's gradual identification with the rest of the African continent started off as a reaction to Europe's rejection and therefore was, at least at the beginning, a process imposed from the outside.

While the 'civilised' nations had let Ethiopia down, black activists were vociferous in Ethiopia's support. Haylä Səlasse saw the possibility of finding new allies, not only during the difficult years of his 1936-1941 exile, but also in the period after the liberation, when European colonialism seemed destined to last many more decades, making Ethiopia's newly-regained independence look precarious and under threat. Black rights organisations and anti-colonial activists, though, were scattered all over the world, and could not offer much in the way of diplomatic influence, economic assets and state resources. Their cooperation during the Italian occupation was gracefully acknowledged on Amharic newspapers, but more to make a patriotic point about Ethiopia's many foreign fans than to discuss the content and merits of their Pan-Africanist and black nationalist ideas. Haylä Səlasse's first choice of allies in the post-liberation period was the United States, whose backing was sought as a counterweight to growing British administrative and financial encroachment in Ethiopia following the British military administration (1941-1945)²³⁹. As far as Ethiopia's international alignment was concerned, 'the 1950s and 1960s might therefore justifiably be described as the American era' (Bahru 1991: 186). It would take many more years after the 1941 liberation for the Ethiopian elites to proactively identify with the black cause, and for a sense of continental-wide empathy to surface in Amharic-language output. Historians tend to consider the Italian occupation as a watershed in the history of Ethiopia's relations with the rest of the continent and with the black diaspora. However, much more than the fascist conquest, it was Ghana's independence in 1957 that forced Ethiopia's political and cultural elites to take a more definite position with regards to African affairs²⁴⁰.

From 1941 to 1957 Amharic-language output is, like in the pre-1936 years, overwhelmingly concerned with Ethiopian and European news, characters, events and setting. According to Gérard, imaginative literature from the period 'was dominated by an overriding concern to restore Ethiopia's greatness and superiority that she allegedly owed to the fact that the Amhara were a Semitic, Christian and literate nation' (Gérard 1971: 326). There were

²³⁹ These years, crucial for Ethiopia's sovereignty and in the shaping of the country's political power in the decades to follow, are treated in Coleman (2010) and Marcus (2003).

²⁴⁰ For a history of Ethiopia's involvement in African politics, see the PhD thesis of Belete Belachew Yihun (2012). It is significant, in terms of periodization, that Belete chooses to start his analysis from 1956, as opposed to the more common 1941.

nonetheless some notable exceptions. Wärqənäh Əšäte's 1928 *YäAlām Jiografi BäAmarəñña* ('World geography in Amharic') goes against the Orthodox Christian cosmological view that Jerusalem²⁴¹ was at the centre of the universe. Instead, Wärqənäh lists Ethiopia among other African countries, and the Africa section does not even start with Ethiopia, but with South Africa. Wärqənäh's move was, in the context of the Grand Narrative at the time, quite bold. Garretson wonders 'whether this initial focus on Ethiopia's position in Africa may have helped to lay the foundation for its post-World War II shift in identity [to] being a country more closely linked to Africa than the Middle East' (2012: 139-140). *YäAlām Jiografi BäAmarəñña* was adopted as a textbook in Ethiopian schools and most of the future ruling elites who went through Western-type of schools in Ethiopia studied on it. It was, therefore, widely influential and is to be considered an early cornerstone in the Ethiopian intellectuals' gradual identification with the African cause.

A second pivotal figure was Mälaku Bäyyan, who during his medical studies at Howard University in the US became gradually involved in Pan-African agitations. Other Ethiopian students in the US remained sheltered in the self-contained campuses of American universities for the whole duration of their studies. Mälaku, instead, actively engaged with American society at large, and, according to Fikru, was the first Ethiopian who gained an in-depth understanding of what it meant to be black in America during Jim Crow (Fikru 2005: 107). Of all Ethiopian intellectuals under consideration in this thesis, Mälaku was the first one to unreservedly identify with the black and Pan-African cause. His beliefs in racial solidarity, he himself declares, 'helped me to break my engagement to the daughter of our Minister of Foreign Affairs and to be married to an American girl of the Black Race in 1931' (Melaku 1939: 6). The decision to rebuff the daughter of the all-powerful Hərüy Wäldä-Selasse in order to marry an African-American office clerk must have been truly shocking for the class-conscious Ethiopia of the time. Dorothy Hadley, Mälaku's African-American wife, actively contributed to Mälaku's pro-Ethiopian activism during the Italian occupation, when Haylä Səlasse sent Mälaku back to the US to enlist the support of black Americans and raise funds for the UK-exiled Ethiopian government. Mälaku's newspaper *Voice of Ethiopia*, launched in 1937, was mostly addressed to African-Americans and was prefaced by slogans directly inspired by black nationalism: 'Black men, Ethiopia is yours', 'Black men, let us together save Ethiopia', 'It is better to die free than live in slavery' and 'No black man shall shed his blood for Europe until Ethiopia is free' (Meseret 2013: 71). Although he had contributed some articles to *Bərhanəñña Səlam* in the 1920s, the greatest bulk of Mälaku's political activism was among diasporic blacks in the US, where he died in 1940. Fikru argues that despite Mälaku's 'marginality to mainstream Ethiopian history', he is to be credited for inaugurating 'a new chapter in history, in this case the chapter

²⁴¹ Or, in other versions, Aksum, see chapter 2.

of Ethiopian-American race relations' (Fikru 2005: 109). Nevertheless, Mälaku was indeed an isolated, and somewhat exceptional, figure in the Ethiopian intellectual landscape of the time:

The spatial extent of his activity was confined to the New World, with marginal relevance to Ethiopian intellectual history. Moreover, in his political profile, Melaku had more in common with West African and West Indian nationalists than with the well-known Ethiopian wartime patriots (Fikru 2005: 109).

The segregationism and institutional racism of the United States continued to have a significant impact on visiting Ethiopian students in the post-war period. Another intellectual who came into contact with Pan-Africanism in the United States was Gärmame Nəway, who studied political science at Columbia University in the early 1950s. Just like in the case of Mälaku, Gärmame was quite a singular figure among the members of his generation²⁴². While his peers were mostly focused on Ethiopian affairs, Gärmame was among the first to take a keen interest in African politics. A measure of his ideological commitment to the continent was his decision to write his MA dissertation on the impact of white settlement policy in Kenya. Submitted in 1954, the dissertation harshly condemned British land policy and economic exploitation in Kenya, urged Africans to 'fight back and [...] cast aside the yoke of despotic oppression and exploitation' (quoted in Greenfield 1965: 349), and contained passages openly inspired by Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial militancy:

The beginning of a substantial and consciously organised movement dedicated to vindicating the human race in conjunction with the efforts of peoples in other parts of the world has for a long time been overdue in Africa [but] the scattered disturbances of Africa today are precursors of the tremor which is to follow. The revolution will continue no doubt until Africans re-assert their right to be masters of themselves and of their continent (quoted in Greenfield 1965: 345-346).

Much more radical than his contemporaries, from whom he grew progressively apart, Gärmame was decidedly not part of the ideological mainstream of his time (Greenfield 1965: 343). Some support for the black cause, though, came also from the old guard of intellectuals, although more in the form of generic declarations of solidarity than in-depth socio-political analysis.

Käbbädä Mikael cuts a rather original figure in the post-war period. One of the main apologists of Haylä Səlasse, his fictional and non-fictional works are almost completely immersed in the Grand Narrative. Partly, he was behind his time – Ethiopia's last, isolated Japanisers, who defended the validity of the Japanese model twenty years after the pro-Japanese fervour had lost momentum among the Ethiopian elites. Partly, he was ahead of his time – his

²⁴² Clearly, however, contrary to Mälaku, his activism had a much more immediate and direct impact in Ethiopian political history.

play *Annibal*, performed at the newly-inaugurated Haylä Səlasse I Theatre during the Silver Jubilee in 1955 (and published in 1963/64), contains ‘one of the earliest formulations of a sense of African solidarity in Amharic creative writing’ (Gérard 1971: 326). The fight between Rome and Carthage allegorically represents, in Kābbādä’s play, the competition between white Europeans and black Africans. This is made clear in the dialogue between two Carthaginians before the decisive battle at Zama between Roman and Carthaginian forces, in which one character explains to the other:

There is, moreover, a question of race and posterity. If the Romans are victorious, the whites will rule. They will possess all wealth and knowledge, and their power over the world will be eternal. They will guide the world. Europe will be the mistress of all nations. To her will go prosperity, science, power. On the contrary, if Hannibal triumphs, then prosperity will change camps, will leave Europe to come to Africa. Splendor, intelligence, grandeur, if transferred to the other continent, will lead to the decay of our race. Think of it; this war between Rome and Carthage, this merciless struggle, does not concern the two cities only. The victory of one or the other side will decide the fate of the peoples of the world. If Rome resists successfully, she will be able to break the development of Africa and to block her way to the future (quoted in Gérard 1971: 325-326).

Hannibal eventually loses to Scipio because the Carthaginian senate, torn by internal rivalries and manipulated by a power-hungry senator, decides not to send more troops in Hannibal’s support. The play duly points at the need for people to rally behind their leader, and Kābbādä’s main message is one of unity, a classic Grand Narrative theme. Hannibal’s fight against Rome alludes to Ethiopia’s recent war with Italy and Hannibal is therefore presented, albeit indirectly, as the Haylä Səlasse of the Carthaginians. Alongside these conventional elements, the play introduces a significant innovation. Kābbādä’s sure-footed identification of Carthage/Ethiopia with black Africa subtly dismantles the erstwhile vision of Ethiopia as kith and kin with Europe. It dramatises the power relation between Europe and Africa, boldly placing Ethiopia among the dominated, and depicts Europe not anymore as a model to imitate, but rather as a historic enemy to beat. It did not go unnoticed by critics that Kābbādä is proposing in this play quite a radical paradigm shift in Ethiopia’s self-identification. Plastow remarks for instance that *Annibal* ‘is highly unusual, in that it emphasises the need for pan-Africanism at a time when the Amharas tended to see themselves as isolated from, and superior to, the majority of Africans’ (1996: 59). Gérard similarly thinks that ‘Kabbada’s pronouncement signals the emergence, in creative writing, of a sense that Ethiopian patriotism was not enough, and that the fate of the country should be thought of in the framework of continental solidarity’ (1971: 326).

As these examples show, feelings of pan-continental empathy did occasionally surface in Amharic fictional and non-fictional output in the years after the liberation. And yet, up until the late 1950s no significant steps were officially taken in support of the Pan-Africanist cause. In the late 1950s, however, ‘there was a sudden and almost dramatic change in the country’s relationship with the continent’ (Balsvik 1975: 205). The independence of Ghana suddenly gave more credibility to the Pan-Africanist and anti-colonial dreams of an independent Africa, and compelled Ethiopia’s leaders to engage more closely and systematically with Pan-Africanist and anti-colonial arguments. While the belief that Ethiopia was a more akin to Western nations than African ones persisted, third- and fourth-generation intellectuals welcomed the news of Ghana’s independence.

Of their superiority over Europe’s African colonies, and indeed over all other Africans, [Ethiopian intellectuals] had at first no doubt, and they compared themselves – albeit unfavourably – with Sweden, Britain, France and the United States. However, it was not long before their enquiries led them farther afield. By the time that Ghana emerged as an independent nation on March 6, 1957, although their elders shrugged their shoulder, many young Ethiopians approved, and the more aware displayed emotions akin even to pride (Greenfield 1965: 319).

The independence of Ghana took the Ethiopian government by surprise, and Ethiopia’s initial involvement in the Pan-Africanist movement was cautious and tentative. In 1957 Ethiopian student representatives were sent to attend a Pan-African conference in Uganda and in 1959 a student delegation attended the East-West Central African Study Seminar in Sierra Leone. At this early stages of Ethiopia’s engagement, though,

It is difficult to assess whether these contacts contributed to the development of a pan-African ideology. It seemed to be of greater importance at the time to send delegates who could make the most favourable impression rather than bring back inspiration (Balsvik 1985: 207).

The benefits Ethiopia could gain from a more active participation in African politics, however, soon became evident. The downfall of colonial empires on the continent would end the continuing threat to Ethiopia’s independence, and offered a first reason to support the anti-colonial camp. The Emperor ‘well understood the precariousness of Ethiopian independence as long as the entire continent was not free, hence his embrace of the African freedom struggle’ (Fikru 2005: 132). Secondly, Ethiopia saw a chance to maintain its continental primacy and extend its hegemony to the newly independent African states, thus greatly strengthening its diplomatic leverage. Haylä Səlasse had a long-standing reputation as Africa’s father and beacon of African freedom. When the Emperor’s reputation was partly clouded by Nkrumah’s rising

political star²⁴³, the Ethiopian ruling elites were pushed to intervene even more proactively in African affairs in order to reaffirm Ethiopia's symbolic and political hegemony on the continent. In Addis Abāba, the government's new continental ambitions led to a 'policy of Africanization' (Fikru 2005: 133) or 'policy of re-Africanizing Ethiopia' (Mazrui 2002: 84), meaning a more decisive intervention of Ethiopia in African matters and a more comprehensive engagement of Ethiopian intellectuals with Pan-Africanism.

In 1958 Ethiopia was invited to Accra for the first Conference of Independent African States, where Haylā Sēlasse launched a scholarship programme for African students to study at UCAA²⁴⁴. Haylā Sēlasse made good use of his long-standing political charisma and of the symbolic capital Ethiopia had accumulated in Sub-Saharan Africa. The leaders of newly-independent African states 'wanted the qualities that Ethiopia seemed to possess: the stability of the regime, the recognition and respect commanded by the emperor in the world, the dignified setting for the conduct of African affairs' (Balsvik 1985: 206). The second Conference of Independent African States was held in Addis Abāba in June 1960. Haylā Sēlasse took up a role of impartial negotiator between different ideological factions in the assembly, the unificationists and the cooperationists. Again at the 1962 Lagos conference, the emperor benevolently mediated between the positions of the Casablanca group and the Monrovia group. Ethiopia embraced the idea of a single African state, but pointing at the necessity to achieve this goal in a measured step-by-step process. Haylā Sēlasse's chosen position as conciliatory *super partes* mediator stressed Ethiopia's political seniority, emphasising a clear-cut power relation between the experienced, magnanimous Emperor and his brash, impetuous juniors. After the Lagos conference, Haylā Sēlasse took the initiative to invite the heads of state of independent African countries to Addis, a neutral city for both the Casablanca and the Monrovia camp, in 1963, for a conference that was successful enough for Addis Abāba to be chosen as the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Ethiopia formalised its leadership position in the OAU and, in the following years, used this ascendancy to steer the organisation towards Haylā Sēlasse's own political line. This proved very advantageous to make sure the OAU would not significantly interfere with Haylā Sēlasse's annexation of Eritrea and military suppression of the Eritrean independent movements. Towering figure of Ethiopia's African diplomacy was Haddis Alāmayāhu, particularly in his stint as Ethiopian ambassador to the UN. In New York, Haddis spearheaded a campaign to stop French nuclear tests in the Sahara, attempted to pass a

²⁴³ The competition between the two leaders lasted well into the 1960s.

²⁴⁴ The first batch of African scholarship students, thirty in all, joined UCAA in autumn 1959. The influence of scholarship students on the Ethiopian student movement is well documented (Balsvik 1985: 205-2011, Fikru 2005: 141-147, Bahru 2014: 101-108), and it is likely that even some third-generation intellectuals crossed paths with them at UCAA in 1959-1960. Fikru, whose book eulogises Haylā Sēlasse's Pan-Africanist commitment, admits nonetheless that 'national prestige had been the unspoken rationale for providing the scholarships' (2005: 42).

resolution to ban the use of nuclear weapons for war purposes²⁴⁵ and took a much harder stance against the apartheid regime in South Africa²⁴⁶.

Second- and third-generation writers were inspired by the independence of African states and by Ethiopia's new role on the continent. For Ethiopian intellectuals, Pan-African themes were politically fashionable and, perhaps more importantly, safely in line with the government's new foreign policy. Kābbādā Mikael's 1962/63 poetry collection *YäḲāne Azmära* ('Harvest of poetry') is probably to be interpreted against this backdrop. Of all the poems in the collection, three stand out for expressing 'some very early notions of what has been termed black consciousness, or *négritude*' (Molvaer 2008: 167). *Ṭəḳuroččəm Əndä Säw* goes back to the Italian occupation, disparages fascist ideology and ridicules the Italians' feelings of superiority; *YäAzinara Əsräñña*, dedicated to the Ethiopian prisoners detained on the Sardinian island of Asinara during the Second World War, is a fiery indictment of European civilisation; *Əroro* virulently attacks the fascist propaganda of racial superiority, and constitutes for Molvaer '[perhaps] the proudest expression of the Ethiopian personality and of Ethiopian values in the Amharic language' (2008: 168). The three poems are clearly in line with the ideas the author had expressed years before in *Annibal*, evidence of Kābbādā's long-term consistency and dedication to the African cause. Kābbādā's anti-colonial and anti-racist fervour, though, was also a measure of his pro-government position. *YäḲāne Azmära* gives a new rhetorical spin to themes the Ethiopian government was already trying to publicise, and indeed to contrast Italian propaganda Kābbādā appeals to Ethiopia's past glories, ending up with a spirited defence of the Grand Narrative. Albeit innovative, *YäḲāne Azmära* was certainly not subversive.

Pan-African themes are interpreted in a much more insubordinate manner by Abbe Gubäñña and Bərhanu Zārihun, the two 'rogue' third-generation intellectuals that often incurred the Emperor's punitive measures. Abbe's 1961/62 verse drama *YäPatris Lumumba Asazzañ Amwamwat* ('The saddening death of Patrice Lumumba') was clearly sympathetic to the deceased Congolese leader, who is portrayed as a freedom-loving martyr adored by his people. Western governments are indicted for their racist beliefs and for plotting Lumumba's death. Kasa-Vubu and Tshombe are represented as puppets in the hands of Western ambassadors and advisers, and the play daringly concludes by saying that Kasa-Vubu and Mobutu are traitors and should be executed. Considering the rift that the Congolese crisis had created in the Conference

²⁴⁵ Interviewed by Molvaer in the late 1980s, Haddis was proud of this resolution, which understandably caused quite a stir in the context of the Cold War. Britain, France and the US protested with the Ethiopian government, who in turn asked Haddis to withdraw the motion (Molvaer 1997a: 141).

²⁴⁶ Until then the Ethiopian government had maintained cordial relationships with its South African counterpart, given that South Africa had backed Ethiopia in the League of Nations during the Italian occupation (for more information see Dederig 2013), and South African troops were part of the British military force that liberated Ethiopia in 1941.

of Independent African States and Ethiopia's mediatory attempts, it is not surprising that the play was heavily censored; Kane is amazed that the play was published at all (1975: 185). Because large sections of the play were censored (in the first scene, for example, the curtain incongruously descends as soon as Lumumba enters the stage for the first time) it is hard to interpret Abbe's intended message. Even in its amended version, it is nevertheless clear that the play is critical of the Ethiopian government's political line.

Bərhanu Zārihun was one of those writers who used a South African setting to indirectly criticise Ethiopia's state of affairs. While making a powerful anti-apartheid statement, his 1962/63 *Dəl KāMot Bāhwala* ('Victory after death') also had a close bearing on Ethiopia's internal situation. Dəkuma, the novel's protagonist, joins an underground anti-apartheid group headed by Father Olinga. Within the anti-apartheid group much like in the Ethiopian intellectual scene at the time, two factions confront each other, the gradualists and the radicals, the former arguing for a slow, step-by-step struggle for freedom, the latter pushing for a faster timeframe. When Dəkuma gets arrested for involuntarily ignoring the orders of a policeman, the anti-apartheid activists decide to organise a demonstration in his support, thus blowing their cover and coming out in the open. The police open fire on the crowd, killing many. Dəkuma is hit and, before dying, apologises to Father Olinga for his responsibility in the death of all the anti-apartheid activists shot by the police. Father Olinga, also about to die, says that nothing is ruined, the torch of their struggle will be passed on to others, and justice will prevail in the end. While the novel was declaredly inspired by the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, the theme of the failed revolution cannot but recall the 1960 coup back home in Ethiopia. Just like the Ethiopian coup makers, the anti-apartheid activists in the novel decided to act too soon, when they were not yet strong enough, forced by the circumstances, and they were crushed by the state's armed forces, their leaders all dead. Bərhanu makes an argument against sudden change in favour of a gradualist position, but he is sympathetic towards Father Olinga's protesters, and one can assume, by extension, also towards Ethiopia's naïve and imprudent but righteous coup-makers. Although the South African theme is a safe cover for Bərhanu to talk about Ethiopia, the novel makes a clear effort to give cultural credibility to its South African characters and is 'probably the first book in Amharic to treat of non-Ethiopians in a realistic manner, seeking to present them in their own milieu' (Kane 1975: 185). Initially serialised in newspapers, *Dəl KāMot Bāhwala* was printed as a book in 1962/63, and, to the author's consternation, did not sell well. To Molvaer, Bərhanu explained the low sales on the grounds that 'Ethiopians were not interested in a story about South Africa. [...] This shows Ethiopia's isolation from the rest of Africa at the time' (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 329). When *Dəl KāMot Bāhwala* was published, Pan-African ideas were still far from hegemonic among educated Ethiopians. The consensus, though, was changing quickly, and more and more third-generation writers were trying their hand at Pan-African themes.

Probably inspired by, and certainly reminiscent of, Bərhanu's *Dəl KāMot Bāhwala* is one of Tāsfaye Gāssāssā's plays, titled *Əkəw* ('The thing'). The play was written in 1968/69 and printed in 1969/70, but it was staged for the first time only after the 1974 revolution. Set in South Africa, the references to Ethiopia were not lost on the censors, and soon enough the performance was shut down. In the Kafkaian-like plot, Zaki, a young educated black South African, is taken to a police office for what he believes is a routine interrogation. To his surprise, after the interrogation he is sent to jail. When he asks what he is being charged of, the policemen reply that 'it is the thing'. Despite his successive requests, nobody tells Zaki what the 'thing' is. The symbolism of the play, where objects, people and places associated to death are all white, makes it clear that the 'thing' has to do with racial issues, and that Zaki's only crime is his blackness. But the interpretation of what the 'thing' is is left open enough for the play to stand as a criticism of totalitarianism in general. On one level, the play, with its surrealist atmosphere, has a universal, existentialist message. At the same time, the plot is also filled with themes typical of the Ethiopian intellectual scene. The Pan-African façade is an excuse for Tāsfaye to indirectly comment, without instantaneously alarming the censors, on the usual debates of his time, such as the generational gap and the critical attitude of the young towards their elders and their teachings. From this point of view, the play intentionally reproduces the assimilationist view of alterity. Tāsfaye has no interest in researching and recreating the cultural and historical context of 1960s South Africa. However, this is not to be interpreted as a sign of laziness or sloppiness on the part of the author. The 'Ethiopianisation' of the plot guides the audience towards Tāsfaye's subversive message that, in his own words, 'in Ethiopia apartheid is also practiced, for example against people regarded as inferior slaves (*bariya*)' (quoted in Molvaer 1997a: 237). Tāsfaye boldly condemns the authoritarian and undemocratic political situation of late 1960s Ethiopia, but he is even bolder in denouncing *habäša* racial prejudices.

The Grand Narrative's belief in *habäša* superiority is incisively castigated by Mängəstu Lämma in his poetic collection 1974 *Baša Ašäbər BāAmerica* ('*Baša Ašäbər* in America'), which is perhaps the deepest and more thoughtful reflection on racism of all the works of first-second- and third-generation intellectuals. Outstanding enough is Mängəstu's choice to put racism at the centre of his artistic endeavour, when his fellow writers had always shown a profound reticence in openly discussing the theme. Mängəstu tackles the issue in his typical fashion, with caustic irony but also with a generous dose of affection for his characters and their flaws. Ašäbər, the petulant and garrulous protagonist of the poem, goes to the United States with the cultural confidence given to him by the Grand Narrative. Although he is aware of America's racial segregationism, he is adamant that it does not apply to him – he is *hābäša*, not black. Strong in his belief about *habäša* exceptionalism, he completely misinterprets American society. Thirsty, Ašäbər enters a café, but he is soon kicked out by the owner, enraged that a black person dared entering a white café. Ašäbər does not understand the owner's reaction and,

offended, he protests. A brawl breaks out between the two men. Security arrives, Ašābər and the café owner are taken to a police station but, while the white man is promptly released, Ašābər is put to jail. He is furious:

The colours of my flag, which adorned my lapel
were admired for beauty, but awe nor fear did they inspire.

[...]

That I, the son of Moja, the pure Menzie
should be arrested like a *šāgole*, a *šanqəlla*
was a mistake, a false accusation
but I failed to persuade anyone.

He takes out his frustration on an African-American man, trying to convince him that he, the *həbäša*, has nothing to do with the ‘fight’ (*täb*) between whites and blacks:

‘Listen brother, don’t you feel sorry for me,
That I should suffer, in vain, from other peoples’ fights?
I know that, since time immemorial, that whites and *šanqəlla*
have begrudged, despised, and fought one another.
On whose side should I, the *həbäša* to be?
Here, feel my hair, I am no *šāgole*.
Behold my face, I am not as dark as you.
I am red [*käy*], look. Ok, let’s say light brown [*täym*].
Anyone who’d say I’m nappy haired must be insane.
My lineage comes from Shem
in direct descent from David and Adam.
You’ve surely heard of the Queen of Sheba.
Her son was named Menilik the First...
[...]
You blacks are the sons of Ham,
and the *färänjočč* the sons of Yafet’.
And thus my history lesson started.

The African-American man is unimpressed with Ašābər’s history lesson. His rejoinder is probably one of the most powerful critiques to the Grand Narrative penned by the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals.

‘This kind of talk makes one look ignorant.
Let me ask you, *Ato Ašābər Kelkai*,
just because you are Ethiopian,

are you saying you are not black African?

[...]

If what you want to know is whether you belong

with the whites or the blacks, my dear Ašābər

then try to have coffee at a white man's cafe.

Or when you ride the train, try to sit with them.

If you can not manage this, then my dear comrade

go into a hotel frequented by whites'.

In the initial part of his argument, Ašābər's African-American companion points out that no identity is a transcendental *a priori*, and no identity exists outside of history. Identity is not shaped in isolation, but is always the product of the interaction between self and other. The narratives of others contribute to define one's individual or collective self as much as, and perhaps even more than, one's own narratives. This interaction always takes place within an ever-shifting and multi-layered network of power relations. In this case, both blacks and *habäša* people share the same power position, a subordinated one, vis-à-vis whites, and their identity is externally imposed as much as internally self-defined. Both suffer the same discrimination, and both are equally otherised. In the second part of his argument, the African-American character goes even further in his deconstruction of the Grand Narrative:

'It did not start with you, this human tendency

to shun the 'victimised' and 'side with' the victor,

to 'adore' the mighty and 'despise' the weak one.

One swears by one's grandfather when dad is not honoured.

Which son of a poor man would not look to the past?'²⁴⁷

In these few lines, the African-American man suggests that the Grand Narrative has been upheld as a defence mechanism against the way Ethiopians were otherised by Westerners. Those who systematised, promoted and disseminated it are thus, the character insinuates, in denial. They held on to the glorious memories of their ancestors only because acknowledging the country's present would be too painful. They 'adored the mighty' and 'sided with the victors': here the reference is to the early intellectuals' Europhilia and their claim that Ethiopia had, or at least deserved, a status equal to Western countries. In truth, though, Ethiopia is poor, and not many glories are to be found in Ethiopia's present. In Ethiopia's imperial nationalism, blacks and Africans are despised, but in fact Ethiopians are as 'weak' as them, and as 'victimised' by whites as them. Mängəstu argues here that the Grand Narrative is nothing other than delusional,

²⁴⁷ My translation has been adapted from Bahrnegash Bellete's translation of the poem in a 2010 special issue of *Callaloo* on Ethiopia's literature, art and culture. See Bahrnegash (2010) for his reflections over the translation process.

and the cultural confidence it inspired is fake and unrealistic. This is as radical a critique as it was possible to get at the time, and is still relevant nowadays as it was fifty years ago. Among all first-, second- and third-generation works, *Baša Ašäbär BāAmerica* marks a high point in the recolonisation of the Grand Narrative.

Contrary to their overall silence on the national question, many third-generation, and even some second-generation intellectuals were quite vocal in pushing for a more direct identification of Ethiopia with the rest of the African continent. They did not problematise Ethiopia's internal border, but contributed to the redefinition of the external border. At least in this specific area, the old intelligentsia worked in partial synergy with the fourth generation, a rare occurrence considering how far the students' ideology and generational identity grew apart from their elders. Despite the partial commitment of the old generations, the bulk of Pan-African activism came as usual from fourth-generation students. Even for them, though, questioning the Grand Narrative's external border was a slow process. At the beginning of the decade,

the cluster of ideas connected to concepts such as 'negritude' and 'African personality', ideological weapons to create and regenerate a specific African culture, were hardly touched upon in the student papers. This may reflect the fact that Ethiopian students possessed an intuitive pride in their own history and cultural heritage which had not been rendered inferior by a prolonged European colonial presence (Balsvik 1985: 209).

For Fikru, it was only in the mid-1960s that 'the Africanization of Ethiopian political consciousness had reached full maturity' (2005: 140). Students read the works of Kwame Nkrumah and other Pan-African intellectuals, arranged international meetings with representatives of other African universities, organised conferences to discuss African history and politics, and demonstrated against white supremacist rule in Rhodesia. The chapters of the *Käbrä Nägäst* proclaiming 'sovereignty for the seed of Shem and slavery for the seed of Ham' became a source of embarrassment and shame, both at home and abroad (Greenfield 1965: 369). A significant year was 1967, when the USUAA (Union of the University Students in Addis Ababa) congress in January declared to be in support of the 'principle of positive non-alignments' and the sixth congress of the NUEUS (National Union of Ethiopian University Students) in March issued a resolution in favour of Pan-Africanism. Another breakthrough in the students' identification with the African cause was a March 1968 demonstration calling for the UK and the OAU to intervene militarily against Ian Smith. Roughly 2,700 students attended, a very high number for the time. Balsvik points out that 'never before had so many been active for an African cause' (1985: 210).

A qualification needs to be introduced regarding the nature of the old generations' Pan-Africanist commitment. The fact that many second- and third-generation writers embraced Pan-Africanism does not have to be necessarily interpreted as a counter-hegemonic move on their part. The Emperor himself was taking an active role in African politics, and promoting Pan-Africanism at home was in his interest. Ethiopia's new diplomatic role in African affairs offered the chance to revamp Ethiopia's own nationalism, adding a new narrative of Ethiopia's continental primacy alongside the old narrative of Ethiopia's biblical links with the Middle East. The type of Pan-Africanism embraced by the Ethiopian imperial elites was not based on a notion of all-African brotherhood. It was instead of a hierarchical kind. Ethiopia was presented as the 'mother' of other African nations, leading them onto the path of emancipation. These new ideas reconfirmed the Grand Narrative's exceptionalism, and this was certainly reassuring for Ethiopian intellectuals, who had for years been frustrated by their country's slow progress. The Grand Narrative was not delivering on its promises and third-generation thinkers grew increasingly disheartened. The intellectuals knew that, if they admitted what they suspected, that the Grand Narrative had proved vain and idle, they would have to start anew in the search of viable alternative models. Because the latter looked a daunting task, the preferred solution was trying to salvage the Grand Narrative as much as possible. The recent developments in Sub-Saharan Africa offered the opportunity to do so. Ethiopia's recent leadership role in African politics was for Ethiopian intellectuals a high-profile success to celebrate, and allowed them to quash their creeping disillusion with Ethiopia's state of affairs. From the 'smallest' of the 'big' nations, always lagging behind the West, Ethiopia could now be viewed, more gratifyingly, as the 'biggest' of the 'small' nations. Third-generation intellectuals, in other words, came to embrace Pan-Africanism out of their attachment to the Grand Narrative. They were bound to be once again disappointed. Considering how education had been a top priority for Haylä Səlasse's government, the revelation at the 1961 Addis Abāba UNESCO conference on education of Ethiopia's poor record compared to other African countries was outright shocking to many intellectuals. The Ethiopian elites unexpectedly found their country at the bottom of all African economic indexes and rankings. Unbeatable when it came to ancient grandeur, Ethiopia's present looked once again grim. The challenges to the Grand Narrative were becoming more and more authoritative and, for the imperial ruling class, harder to keep in check.

Reconsidering the Italian occupation

Contrary to other aspects of the Grand Narrative, the acolonial depiction of the Italian occupation has seldom been comprehensively challenged. Debates over the national question have become one of the most recurrent topics of recent Ethiopian historiography; the 'Africanisation' of Ethiopian scholarship has also continued, albeit less energetically; and the legacy of Adwa, veritably the foundational myth of the Grand Narrative, has also been questioned. In these three cases, the Grand Narrative's conception of Ethiopia as acolonial has

been put into question, internal and external power relations have been brought back at the centre of historical analysis and counter-historiographies have gained a new scholarly prominence. The interpretation of the Italian occupation, though, has not been significantly revisited. Even though the fascist years have a central role when it comes to discussing Ethiopia's relationship with colonialism, the acolonial paradigms described in the previous chapter continue to underpin the historiography of the period. The only exception are ethno-nationalist historians, who often turned the Grand Narrative on its head, describing how the Italian invasion was, for non-*habäša* Ethiopians, a long-desired liberation from *habäša* oppression. In some cases, this was certainly true, and Oromo-language poems exist, just to make an example, celebrating the defeat of Haylä Səlasse at the hands of the Italians²⁴⁸. Yet, the ethno-nationalist reading is as one-sided as the Grand Narrative. Those who welcomed the Italians, disparaged as traitors in the Grand Narrative, are glorified by ethno-nationalists as heroes, and vice versa ethno-nationalist scholars conveniently discount the anti-Italian resistance of many non-*habäša* fighters. For the contemporary supporters of the Grand Narrative, instead, the fact that the patriots came from different ethnic groups is yet another proof of the 'unity' of the 'nation'²⁴⁹. Both perspectives remain partial and unsatisfactory.

A general tendency in historiography is either to underemphasise or overemphasise the impact of the occupation. Interpretations inspired by Grand Narrative, as already seen in the previous chapter, tend to present the 1935-1941 years as a great national and moral victory for Ethiopia, thus minimising the consequences of the occupation. There are some grounds to support this interpretation. From the point of view of political history, there is indeed a strong continuity between the pre-1936 and the post-1941 period. The changes produced by the occupation, in Clapham's assessment, 'do not amount to very much more than would probably have taken place anyhow had Haylä Səlasse remained in power between 1936 and 1941' (1969: 21). The effects of the occupation on the central government 'seem to have been surprisingly slight. The Emperor continued, more or less, where he had left off in 1936, with the same personal supremacy, very similar gradually modernising policies, and much the same groups of officials' (Clapham 1969: 20). The same could be argued for the political thought of Ethiopian educated elites, which after the liberation remained virtually identical to what it was in pre-war decades. The Grand Narrative alone kept dominating political and historical discussions, and the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals never ventured away from it.

²⁴⁸ One of these, by Shaykh Bakrii Saphalo, goes as follows: 'The Italians drove their tanks / towards the flowering Ceeka tree / They entered and finished the Amhara / Like a sheep for feast / Mussolini destroyed them / The legs of the Amhara throne / The king panicked and went into exile / The skinny man with angry face / The king who oppresses the poor / Will be overthrown' (quoted in Mohammed Hassen 2003: 145-146).

²⁴⁹ In general, inter-ethnic and regional recriminations have governed the way the Italian occupation, like many other historical events, is remembered nowadays, with accusations of treachery sent back and forth across the Amhara/Tigrayan, *habäša*/non-*habäša* and Ethiopian/Eritrean divides.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are scholars, both Ethiopian and Western, who instead greatly emphasised the effects of the occupation. Kane, for example, considers the occupation one those ‘great watersheds in a nation’s history, events which so alter the ways of life or produce such a profound psychological impress in the mind of the people that the statement, ‘and nothing was ever the same again’, may be safely made’ (1975: 151). Italian scholarship, in its recently revamped postcolonial consciousness (Palumbo 2003, Triulzi 2006a, Calchi-Novati 2008, Lombardi-Diop & Romeo 2012), tends to agree with Kane that the Italian occupation marked a radical turning point in the history of Ethiopia. Reacting against the persistent ‘postcolonial amnesia’ of contemporary Italy as well as against a worrying pro-fascist revisionism, Italian historians have stressed, in a gesture of scholarly atonement, how Italy was primarily responsible for the political instability of the Horn of Africa post-1960s (Labanca 2004)²⁵⁰. The Ethiopian ruling class alternatively diminished or amplified the impact of the occupation depending on the context. At home, they celebrated the victories of the patriots and the resilience of Ethiopian nationhood, in an attempt to boost the credibility of the Grand Narrative. When dealing with the international community, Ethiopian public figures tended instead to emphasise the long-lasting destructive consequences of the fascist rule, both as an argument to attract aid and also to justify their country’s underdevelopment in the eyes of foreigners²⁵¹.

The subject of the Italian occupation was a ticklish one for Haylä Səlasse, given his contentious decision to leave the country after the Mayčāw defeat and his equally contentious reputation, after the liberation, of promoting the collaborators and marginalising the patriots. His censors were consequently more alert than usual when it came to reviewing works treating the Italian years, and this made it hard for writers to deviate from the canonised way of narrating the occupation. There is at least one source of evidence for this. Mängəstu Lämma told Plastow that his *Şärra Kolonyalist* (‘Anti-Colonialist’, originally titled ‘Kassa’ after the protagonist) was written as early as 1973, but Mängəstu knew that it would have been judged unsuitable for

²⁵⁰ How such postcolonial guilt is also a form of postcolonial narcissism has been pointed out with reference to the historiography of other African countries. Considering the colonial period a drastic turning point in the history of colonised countries assumes Europe was the central defining agent in the history of African people. The frequent division of African history in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial ‘reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to prepositional time. The term confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history. Other cultures share only a chronological, prepositional relation to a Eurocentred epoch that is over (post-), or not yet begun (pre-). In other words, the world’s multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time (McClintock 1992: 86). Recently, historians have emphasised the long-term socio-political continuities between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial period, thus displacing the earlier analytical centrality of European colonialism and its impacts (an example of this type of analysis, in the case of the Horn, is Reid 2003).

²⁵¹ In his autobiography, to cut a heroic figure and anticipate any possible criticism about the shortcomings of his rule, Haylä Səlasse describes the daunting task, after the liberation, of ‘rehabilitating a people who had experienced moral breakdown and whose culture had been undermined’ under European rule (1994: 169).

production and therefore only released it after the Revolution (Plastow 1996: 160). According to Mängəstu, Haylä Səlasse did not welcome plays about the occupation (Plastow 1996: 160). This is not entirely true, as the Italian occupation was in fact one of the most frequent themes of post-1941 literary production, and a very high number of novels and plays touched on the topic. In the case of *Şärra Kolonyalist*, then, it is not the topic *per se*, but rather the way Mängəstu treats it, that was unacceptable at the time.

Representing the life of various groups of people in a small town under the Italians, the play refuses to portray all characters as pure and heroic. One of the protagonists, Kasse, is a *wəşt arbäñña* (undercover patriot), but he does not hesitate to set up a huge con operation to get money to finance the resistance. He convinces Wuhib, a ‘man of knowledge’ who is physically drained by the inhumane labour conditions under the Italians, to pretend to be a diviner and tell invented prophecies to the people needing his advice in exchange for a fee. The trick is so successful that they soon become rich, and although they extort great part of their money from the Italian authorities or the collaborators, they do not seem worried that common people are being deceived as well. Wuhib, the ‘intellectual’, selfishly enjoys his new wealth and status and is unconcerned about the misery and afflictions of his townsfolk. He refuses to engage in politics and instead tries to win the favour of the Italian authorities in order to improve his own personal position. When towards the end of the play it is revealed that Kasse is working with the resistance, Wuhib is genuinely distraught and disappointed. The character of the Ethiopian collaborator, Aytänfəsu, is generally despicable, but not wholly unsympathetic; he is in fact still loyal to his country, and collaborates with the Italians only because forced by the circumstances. In typical Mängəstu fashion, he is made fun of more than castigated. The Italian characters too are given an unusual amount of space, and if Poggio, the overseer of the Ethiopian labourers, is a brutal and pitiless man, the other Italian character, commander Battioni is, despite his evident racism, quite charming, and positively impresses the Ethiopian characters with his manners and his fluent Amharic. Perhaps more radically, the play depicts the daily struggles of common people under Italian domination and the different compromises they have to make in order to survive. The secular, almost domestic atmosphere could not be farther from the grandiloquent rhetoric of Mäkönnən Əndalkačəw’s *YäDäm Dəms* (‘The voice of blood’ 1954/55), where martyrdom, angels, heaven and God represent a major focus of the plot. Mängəstu treats his characters in a non-judgemental way, refrains from moral dogmatism and blurs the boundary between good and evil. In this, *Şärra Kolonyalist* departs from the conventional way in which the Italian occupation was narrated at the time.

But Mängəstu goes even further than this already-significant critique, and, in a lucidly self-critical passage, he decries the illusions and contradictions of pro-*zämä nawinnät* intellectuals. Spokesperson for the author is, as in many others of Mängəstu’s works, an old

man modelled on Mängəstu's own father. In the opening of the third act, the old man is sitting alone, speaking to himself:

Oh European civilisation [*səltane*]! Them, 'civilised', coming to civilise us!

Oh! Oh! Europe! We admired you so much! We envied you! Your reputation for beauty! Your sweet name! Your shining, warm, bright light! Where is all this today? The light of Rome has proved to be absolute darkness (Mängəstu 1983: 65).

The statement is an indictment of the Europhilia of the first and, partly, second generation of intellectuals. They only saw the light of Europe, the old man says, and were oblivious to (or perhaps, decided to ignore) the darkness of European racism and colonial violence. The links with European colonialism elsewhere in the world are not made explicit, so it is unclear whether Mängəstu is trying to obliquely accuse the old generations of overlooking European colonial cruelty as long as the victims were others. The critique, as powerful as it is, is just hinted, and the play stops short of building a broader argument on the shortcomings of early 20th century political thought. While the Grand Narrative's supremacy continued unabated after 1941, the occupation was nevertheless a profoundly traumatic experience for many Ethiopian elites, and although the trauma was initially suppressed, the memory of the Italian ordeal certainly informed, in ways that have not yet been studied, the crisis of the Grand Narrative in the 1960s. This remains something to be tackled in the future agenda of Ethiopian historical scholarship.

An agenda for the future

Towards the 1960s, the attitude of the third generation towards the Grand Narrative had become more ambivalent. On one hand, the counter-narrative of decline became increasingly hard to ignore. At the beginning of the century, first-generation intellectuals flirted with the idea of a brief foreign mandate on Ethiopia. After the Italian occupation few intellectuals dared fantasising about the benefits of European colonialism in Ethiopia. The third generation looked back at pre-war Europhilia with scepticism, and the pro-*zämänawinnät* enthusiasm of the first decades of the century considerably abated. The first and second generations had believed that Ethiopia could achieve *zämänawinnät* via the hybridisation of indigenous ethics and customs with foreign technical skills. The fusion between Ethiopian religious and political values and Western scientific knowledge, in the eyes of third-generation intellectuals, was an experiment gone wrong. Against the rosy predictions of the beginning of the century, the aspiration that Ethiopia would rapidly become as powerful as Western countries was repeatedly frustrated. While first- and second-generation intellectuals were quickly integrated in the country's political ruling class, third-generation writers grew progressively estranged from the imperial government. They did sporadically raise their voice against the Grand Narrative, and their contribution to reassessing some aspects of Ethiopian political thought was not as insignificant as fourth-generation students contended.

The growing disillusionment, however, mostly resulted in a self-protective reaction. Third-generation writers anxiously attempted to salvage the Grand Narrative at all costs. The recent independence of African countries offered such possibility and the imperial state was quick to seize it. In government rhetoric, Ethiopia started being portrayed as a black icon, the beacon of African freedom, the wise mother of African people. For the intellectuals, the relationship with Africans and blacks changed after Ethiopia's hopes to become as powerful and influential as Western countries faded away, first during the Italian occupation, and then in the following decades, when the country's lack of progress became too evident for Ethiopian intellectuals to gloss over. Rejected and otherised by the West, the Ethiopian ruling elite turned to continental Africa to buttress national patriotism. The new hierarchical Pan-Africanism was modelled on the Grand Narrative's hierarchical nationhood. The former posited that all Africans are united, but Ethiopians are more senior than the rest, while the latter posited that all Ethiopians are united, but some cultural groups are more 'Ethiopian' than others. The tension between Pan-Africanism and Ethiopian exceptionalism remained unresolved. Adwa, for instance, was narrated in the Grand Narrative as a 'black victory', a 'victory of African people against European invaders', while at the same time it is underlined how Ethiopia, an 'ancient kingdom' was the only polity to defeat the Europeans and retain its independence. The incorporation of Pan-Africanism was a final addition to the Grand Narrative, and Ethiopian intellectuals welcomed the adjustment. While cultural production had usually had a centripetal predisposition, African themes, events and people now started appearing more frequently in Ethiopian books and newspapers, even if only to allow the author to circumvent censorship.

Such international realignment is the fundamental backdrop against which the national question was first raised. The internal distinction between *habäša* Ethiopians and non-*habäša* Ethiopians was constructed in the same way as the distinction between *habäša* Ethiopians and non-*habäša* Africans. The way the 'internal other' and the 'African other' were imagined was analogous, and when the country's external border shifted, the internal one started being questioned as well. Twentieth century African philosophy emerged as a reaction against European colonialism and racism (Masolo 1994, Imbo 1998, Wiredu 2004). Ethiopian political thought was instead unconcerned about either of the two, but the experience of being discriminated and otherised by Westerners, as shown by works like *Baša Ašäbär BāAmerica*, engendered a new analytical sensibility for power relations. Being victims of discrimination made some intellectuals more sensitive to the discrimination they were agents of, both domestically and continentally. Writers started to critically reflect on how the Grand Narrative otherised blacks as well as non-*habäša* people within Ethiopia. As a first step, Ethiopian thinkers moved closer to Pan-Africanism, and this set the scene for a second, much more radical step, the articulation of the national question.

Conclusions

The political thought of the first three generations of Amharic-speaking Ethiopian intellectuals revolves around the state-sponsored historiographical tradition that I have referred to as Grand Narrative. Despite minor variations in tone and emphasis, throughout the period under consideration the Grand Narrative has maintained a clearly defined identity. It has, in fact, been progressively stabilised, particularly in the post-1941 phase of Haylä Səlassə's reign. There is a strong continuity in the history of the political thought of Ethiopian elites from the institution of the Ethiopian state under Mənilək II to the rise of the fourth generation in the late 1960s. The Grand Narrative was the main element of continuity and the determinant dimension orienting the political thought of Addis Abāba intellectuals in the imperial era. The relationship of Ethiopian intellectuals with this narrative was much more significant, in terms of the impact it had on their political thought, than the relationship with Western ideologies and theories. The thesis has therefore rejected the use of terminology derived from Euro-American political philosophy, reflecting instead on how some key Amharic concepts were defined and theorised in local fictional and non-fictional output.

The Grand Narrative is characterised by a teleological vision of history based on the prophecy of Ethiopia's earthly glory and eschatological victory. Central to the Grand Narrative is the cult of the monarchy as God-ordained, and the first three generations of 20th century intellectuals never strayed from a hierarchical idea of society with the emperor at the top. In the Grand Narrative, identities are conceived in a transcendental and essentialist manner, and this is linked to a specific way of constructing cultural otherness. Alterity is described as intrinsically and radically different from the cultural self of the writer, and perceived in a hostile way as a threat. The usual reaction of first-, second- and third generation intellectuals was to deny and negate the presence of alterity. If the presence of cultural others was too imposing to be ignored, then alterity was either assimilated to the cultural self of the author, or treated as an enemy and actively antagonised.

The fact that virtually all first-, second- and third-generation intellectuals upheld the Grand Narrative led to two major ideological consequences. Firstly, the Grand Narrative's teleology prevented intellectuals from processing elements of historical discontinuity and rupture. Secondly, the Grand Narrative's unicentric vision of cultural identity prevented them from processing elements of socio-ethnic diversity both within the Ethiopian state and in the international context. The intellectuals who embraced the Grand Narrative conceived Ethiopia as defined by two borders: an internal border dividing *habäša* Christian highlanders and non-*habäša* non-Christian lowlanders, and an external border dividing Ethiopia from the rest of the African continent. Both borders were constructed based on the same principle of *habäša*

exceptionalism, which stresses *habäša* uniqueness and civilisational superiority vis-à-vis non-*habäša* Ethiopians and Africans.

Alongside the Grand Narrative, other political interpretations of Ethiopia's present and past took shape in the years following the 1896 Adwa victory. Contrary to the Grand Narrative's prediction of an ever-increasing Ethiopian greatness, these alternative historiographies focused on Ethiopia's lack of economic progress, shaky national cohesion, and international weakness. The counter-historiographies were elaborated both at the centre and at the periphery of the Ethiopian state, and had the potential to unseat the Grand Narrative. They were, therefore, constantly suppressed. Even when, in the decades following the 1941 liberation, third-generation intellectuals grew disillusioned with the promises of the Grand Narrative, they proved profoundly reluctant to dismiss it altogether, and held onto it against the ever-growing empirical evidence that the destiny of glory it anticipated for Ethiopia was far from concretising. The Grand Narrative was perceived to have such a strong and time-tested explanatory power that no alternative ideological options were believed to be as viable. A sense of apprehension or even anxiety imbues first-, second- and third-generation works whenever the author was forced to deal with the emergence in Ethiopian society of centrifugal ideological tendencies. The Grand Narrative's exaltation of Ethiopia's superiority was too reassuring for the intellectuals to question. The counter-historiographies of decline were only comprehensively addressed by the fourth generation of intellectuals.

The Grand Narrative and the counter-historiographies are characterised by antithetical attitudes towards the concept of the 'colonial'. In this thesis, the term 'coloniality' has been used to refer to the system of economic, political, and ideological power relations defining one's relationship with cultural alterity. In its privileging of transcendental and transhistorical approaches and in its reductionist conception of cultural otherness, the Grand Narrative tends not to account for these power relations. The Grand Narrative defines itself *against* the colonial, and negates the multifaceted way in which Ethiopian history was influenced by forms of local and international coloniality. Chapter 5 has analysed four different ways in which Ethiopian intellectuals reproduced in their works the Grand Narrative's 'acolonial' character. Both the victory at Adwa and the Italian occupation were used to reinforce feelings of patriotism, with little analytical attention spent on their short- and long-term impacts and political implications. Acolonial was also the upholding, on the part of the intellectuals, of the Grand Narrative's internal and external border. The two borders, based as they were on ideas of *habäša* exceptionalism and on a centre/periphery hierarchy, defined the way in which both Ethiopian nationhood and Ethiopia's relation with the rest of the African continent were theorised. Two opposing tensions underpin the intellectuals' conception of Ethiopianness. On one side is the necessity to project narratives of horizontal solidarity to ensure national cohesion and continental collaboration; on the other side is the need to reinforce the exclusive identity of the

Ethiopian ruling class and create a narrative able to support the political process of elite formation. Discourses emphasising horizontal unity coexisted side by side with discourses emphasising vertical diversity, in a contradiction that was never fully addressed by any of the intellectuals considered in this thesis.

Overarching theme of Ethiopian political thought is the belief in the possibility for Ethiopia to achieve an ‘acolonial modernity’. Ethiopian thinkers envisioned *zämänawinnät* as a process distinct and separated from colonialism. The ideological links between European modernity, colonialism and Eurocentrism were not problematised. Up until the late 1950s, European colonialism and racism were rarely antagonised in a direct way in the works of Ethiopian writers, whose attention was mostly focalised, at the opposite, on how Ethiopia could reach the level of socio-economic development of Western nations. Ethiopia’s non-colonised status was a crucial component in the claim that Ethiopia was the ‘smallest’ of the world’s ‘big’ nations, on the level of Western powers in terms of civilisational prestige and historical achievements. It is within this framework that the Europhilia of many intellectuals, particularly early on in the century, needs to be understood. Far from signifying their alienation from Ethiopian cultural roots, as some historians have suggested, the intellectuals’ Europhilia was a measure of their confidence in Ethiopia’s cultural resources. Hybridising local political and cultural customs with Western technology and science would have led Ethiopia, according to the intellectuals, to achieve an even better and more advanced modernity than the Western one. They consequently urged their fellow educated Ethiopians to carefully scrutinise the Western model and then proceed to critically incorporate the best elements of that model into the Ethiopian milieu. Processes of creative incorporation, and not mimicry or passive emulation, were at the centre of the intellectuals’ desired *zämänawinnät*.

Yet, by the intellectuals’ own admission, such hybridisation failed. Chapter 4 has investigated the causes of this perceived failure, showing how the old generations’ ‘inability or unwillingness’ to put the Grand Narrative’s acoloniality into discussion was at the centre of the criticism raised against them. The intellectuals’ socio-political position at the highest levels of the Ethiopian state and their dependence on Haylä Səlassə’s patronage strongly conditioned their ideological position. Although there were limited possibilities to express dissent within the constraints of Ethiopia’s authoritarian system, both the ‘failure by co-option’ and the ‘failure by inertia’ interpretation correctly highlight how the old intelligentsia remained an essentially pro-system social force. Even if some third-generation intellectuals started growing frustrated at the country’s slow pace of change and disappointed with the Emperor’s leadership, they continued to hope, sometimes against ever-growing evidence, that Ethiopia would soon achieve levels of socio-economic development comparable to those of the West.

Many third-generation writers nevertheless protested at what they saw as their peers' anxious attachment to the Grand Narrative. Šägaye Gäbrä-Mädən's 1965 poem 'Also of Etiopics' is an example. The following observations by Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam echo Šägaye's criticism:

We have no reason to protest vehemently against cultural assimilation because we have never been victim to it. If we have become westernized it is because we wanted to. It has not been forced upon us. Likewise we have no reason to search for our roots because we have never lost them. [...] We have become victims of our own tradition, of our own roots. We have lost ourselves in self-praise, in clapping our hands to our stunted tradition which we consider sacred (Sahlä-Səlasse quoted in Beer 1977: 101).

Sahlä-Səlasse's argument could not be further away from the alienation thesis. For him, it is the staunch attachment to Ethiopia's 'stunted tradition', and here the reference is to the Grand Narrative, that is preventing Ethiopian intellectuals from rising up to the challenges of the contemporary era. At the same time, Sahlä-Səlasse stresses how the 'Westernisation' of certain aspects of Ethiopian culture was not merely the effect of a passive imitation of the West, but was implemented from a position of high, even excessive, cultural confidence.

Sahlä-Səlasse is ultimately drawing attention to the agency of Ethiopian intellectuals. Ethiopian writers were not inert receivers of Western knowledge and were not manipulated into uncritically accepting Eurocentric paradigms. Sahlä-Səlasse is, in other words, arguing against the alienation theory. Messay has accused Ethiopian intellectuals to be 'no longer subjects, but objects, representations of the West' (2003a: 2). Ethiopians, for him, 'are but giving up the power of interpretation, that is, the power of construing themselves and the surrounding world in accordance with their priorities and aspirations' (2003a: 2). The case of Mäkönnən Dästa nevertheless shows that foreign knowledge was approached discerningly and strategically. The Western Semiticist paradigm was consciously embraced to bolster the cultural prestige of the Ethiopian ruling elite; Western racial theories were bent to serve objectives of elite formation and nation-building; Pan-African narratives were appropriated to launch a renewed version of Ethiopian nationalism and boost Ethiopia's diplomatic primacy on the continent. Far from being the result of collective unconscious pathologies – what Messay calls 'spiritual malaise' – these were perfectly rational conceptual choices. If we want to give credit to the hypothesis of failure, the answer cannot be reduced to ideological mimicry.

The independence of African countries at the end of the 1950s gave Ethiopian elites a chance to further reinvigorate the Grand Narrative. Ethiopia's high-profile role in African affairs offered grounds to reaffirm Ethiopia's primacy. The conception of Ethiopia as the

‘smallest’ of the ‘big’ nations was growingly untenable, after the ‘big’ nations repeatedly made clear, starting with the way they refused to intervene in Ethiopia’s favour during the Italian invasion, that Ethiopia was for them an ‘African other’. The independence of African countries, and Ethiopia’s leadership in African politics, allowed Ethiopian elites to shift Ethiopia’s identification from the ‘smallest’ of the ‘big’ nations to the ‘biggest’ of the ‘small’ nations. The relationship between Ethiopia and the rest of the continent was theorised using the same ‘unity-and-diversity’ model that underpinned state-sponsored ideas of Ethiopian nationhood. By depicting Ethiopia as the ‘mother’ of other African nations, Ethiopian elites could reframe in a hierarchical way the Pan-Africanist emphasis on African brotherhood.

Although Pan-Africanism was often embraced out of a desire to re-energise the Grand Narrative, and not necessarily as part of an overall questioning of *habäša* exceptionalism, the old intelligentsia was not completely uninvolved in the ‘recolonisation’ of the Grand Narrative. Starting from the 1960s, the counter-historiographies of decline gained a new authority, and centrifugal ideological tendencies multiplied. The acoloniality of the Grand Narrative was gradually questioned too. A more dialogic and pluralistic conception of cultural otherness was put forward in the way both Ethiopian nationhood and Ethiopia’s relationship with the rest of the continent were conceived. Local and international power relations started receiving more analytical attention. The old intelligentsia contributed to this process, but only partially, and proved unwilling to question the *habäša*-centrism of the Ethiopian state.

However timid their departure from the Grand Narrative was, the influence and importance of the old intelligentsia in Ethiopian intellectual history is ultimately unquestionable. Fourth-generation students, many of whom are now influential Ethiopian historians, tended, and still tend, to portray post-1941 elites in a dismissive way. Bahru, for example, brushes aside their contribution by claiming that ‘quite in contrast to the intellectual vibrancy that prevailed in the 1920s, the post-Liberation years were characterized by an assiduous cultivation of the emperor’s personality cult’ (2014: 36). The many examples from Amharic fictional and non-fictional works cited in this thesis, though, paint a much more generous picture of the creativity and complexity of first-, second- and third-generation production. *Araya*, for instance, although unable to transcend the limitations of the Grand Narrative, debates the merits and demerits of European colonialism from multiple angles, critically interrogates notions of nationhood and nation-building, and does not refrain from criticising Ethiopia’s lack of progress and some of Haylä Səlasse’s political decisions. Other scholars, too, disagreed with the fourth-generation’s tendency to depict their elders as passive pawns in the hands of the Emperor. Clapham described a more nuanced political situation where the educated elites, despite being strongly subordinated to the Emperor, were at times able, at least in part, to influence Haylä Səlasse’s agenda on some policy points (1969: 91). An even more constructive avenue of research would be to investigate the contribution of the

intellectuals to shaping what Andreas Eshete calls the ‘ethos of modernity’. The old intelligentsia may have failed to bring about political change, but *zämänawinnät* was understood, both at a popular and elite position, not only as macro-level political assets and economic systems, but also as daily practices, customs, patterns of consumption, lifestyles. *Zämänawinnät* enunciated from everyday lived experiences and social practices, and was lived on a daily basis as much as theorised in the corridors of power. The cultural products created by the old intelligentsia contributed to this diffuse, ordinary *zämänawinnät*. In turn, everyday lived experiences and social practices shaped the intellectuals’ political thought in ways that have not yet been mapped out²⁵².

This thesis has argued that the relationship with cultural alterity is the defining element of both the Grand Narrative and the counter-historiographies that challenged it. The counter-narratives took shape around a gradual acknowledgement of alterity. The Grand Narrative’s internal and external borders were constructed on an antagonistic conception of alterity. Otherness was theorised as a threat to compete against, a danger to erase, or a rival to assimilate. From the 1960s onwards, Ethiopian political thought moved towards a more inclusive position towards cultural alterity. The recolonisation was partial, inconsistent, and often flawed. Third-generation intellectuals, whether for reasons of economic co-option or socio-ideological inertia, only occasionally dared contradicting the Grand Narrative. Some counter-historiographies reacted against *habäša* discrimination by proposing conceptions of cultural identity as antagonistic and essentialising as those of the Grand Narrative. Constructing a positive image of otherness and theorising a framework for intercultural dialogue and multicultural coexistence remain something to be tackled in the future agenda of Ethiopian political thought.

²⁵² I am deeply grateful to Semeneh Ayalew for this point. Semeneh’s ongoing research in Ethiopian cultural history addresses precisely this knowledge gap.

Appendix 1 – Bio-bibliographies

The first generation

- 1) **Gäbrä-Həywät Baykādañ (1886-1919)** was born in the district of Adwa. Adopted by an Austrian family at seven years old, he studied in Germany, after which he returned to Ethiopia and worked as an interpreter for Mənilək. Fallen out of favour with Empress Taytu, he relocated to British Sudan in 1909. Back in Ethiopia, he initially supported *Ləjj Iyasu*, but later shifted his allegiance to Täfäri who made him successively inspector of the Addis Abäba-Djibouti railway in 1916 and *näggadras* of Dəre Dawa. Gäbrä-Həywät died at 33 years old in 1919. He wrote two major works, a history book titled *Aṭe Məniləkənnä Ityopya* ('Mənilək and Ethiopia'), published in 1912 in a Swedish mission journal in Asmara, and a treatise on political economy titled *Māngəstənnä YäHəzb Astädadär* ('Government and public administration'), published posthumously.

More information on Gäbrä-Həywät Baykādañ: Təgabe (1969/70), Caulk (1978), Ayyälä (1981), Shiferaw (1994), Bahru (2002), Alemayehu (2003), Messay (2006), Salvadore (2007 and 2009).

- 2) **Wärkənäh Əšäte (1865-1952)** was born in Gondär and adopted by a British officer during the British military expedition in Ethiopia in 1868. He grew up in India, specialised as a doctor in Scotland and only returned to Ethiopia in 1899. In 1902 and 1903, he served on two joint Ethio-British missions in the Ogaden against Mohammed Abdullah Hassan. In 1908-1913, he was Mənilək II's personal doctor during the monarch's last years. After a period in Burma from 1913 to 1920, he returned again to Ethiopia and started working for Ras Täfäri. In 1925, he became the superintendent of the Täfäri Mäkonnen School and founded the *Fəḳərənnä Agälgəlot Mahbär* ('Love and Service Association') to offer training to children of liberated slaves. In 1928 he published his *YäAlām Jiografi BäAmarəñña* ('World geography in Amharic'). After four years as provincial administrator in Čärčär, he was sent to London as Ethiopian ambassador in 1934, where he rallied support for Ethiopia during the Italian invasion. He returned to Addis Abäba in 1942, where he retired to private life until his death in 1952. He left a diary, an autobiography and many newspaper articles, published on *Bərhanənnä Sälām* in the pre-war period and in *New Times and Ethiopia News* during the Italian occupation.

More information on Wärkənäh Əšäte: Sileshi (1982), Bahru (2002), Garretson (2012).

- 3) **Afəwərḳ Gäbrä-Iyyäsus (1868-1947)** grew up in Zäge, on Lake Tana, and went through church schooling there until he was introduced to Mənilək's court some time after 1880. In 1887, he was sent to Italy to study fine arts in Turin, and was the official interpreter of the

1889 Ethiopian diplomatic mission that signed the infamous diplomatic treaty of Wuchale containing a translation discrepancy that, in the Italian but not the Amharic version of the document, reduced Ethiopia to an Italian protectorate. Back in Ethiopia in 1890, he fell out of favour with Empress Taytu, and left again the country in 1894 to study in Switzerland. From there, he crossed the border to Italy during the 1895-96 Italo-Ethiopian war to offer his services to the Italian authorities. After the debacle at Adwa, Afäwärķ stayed on in Italy to teach in Naples, where he composed his major works, until Täfäri allowed him back to Ethiopia in 1917/8. He served in important government roles in Däre Dawa and Addis Abäba, and in 1932 he was sent back to Italy as Ethiopian *chargé d'affaires*. He betrayed Ethiopia a second time by openly taking the side of the Italians during the 1936-41 occupation, and after the liberation he was condemned to life imprisonment in Jemma, where he died in 1947. Afäwärķ was a prolific writer: he wrote the first Amharic-language novel titled *Läbb Wälläd Tarik* ('Story from the heart', 1908), the satirical *Guide du voyageur en Abyssinie* ('Traveller's guide in Abyssinia', in Amharic and French), a biography of Mənilək II (*Dagmawi Mənilək Nəgusä Nəgäst Zältiyopya*, 'Emperor Mənilək of Ethiopia', 1909), books on Amharic grammar, and a new edition of the Psalms of David. *Läbb Wälläd Tarik* is the story of a family (mother, father and siblings Wahəd and Təbbya) separated by a war in their country between a Christian king and a pagan king; the family eventually reunites and the pagan king converts to Christianity and marries Təbbya.

More information on Afäwärķ Gäbrä-Iyyäsus: Fusella (1951, 1961, 1963, 1983 and 1984), Stella (1986), Rouaud (1982, 1991, 2002 and 2003), Taye (1995), Yonas (1995a).

- 4) **Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam (1884-1977)** went through the first stages of church education before moving to Harär and becoming a protégé of Ras Mäkönnən. He was brought up in Ras Mäkönnən's house together Täfäri and Əmru Haylä-Səlasse. He studied in Russia for 11 years at military schools, and after two brief sojourns in Paris and London he started working for the Addis Abäba municipality. He tried to win the favour of Ləjj Iyasu, but the prince disappointed him and Täklä-Hawaryat joined the 1916 coup that toppled him. His play *Fabula: YäAwrewočč Komediya* ('Fable: the comedy of animals', 1920/21) is generally considered the first Amharic-language play; it tells the history of Ethiopia from Adwa to the 1920s using animals as allegorical characters. Täfäri appointed Täklä-Hawaryat governor of Jijiga and later of Čärčär. In 1931 he was asked to write a draft of the Ethiopian constitution, and few months later he was appointed Minister of Finance. His fiscal rigour antagonised the imperial palace, and he was posted away to London, Paris and then Geneva as Ethiopian minister. He rushed back to Ethiopia when the Italians invaded in 1935, but on the wake of the Ethiopian defeat he went into exile in Djibouti, Aden and later Madagascar. He moved back to Ethiopia some years after the liberation, and retired to private life in the countryside until his death.

More information on Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam: Ricci (1988), Plastow (1996 and 2010), Molvaer (1997a), Surafel (2009), Bahru (2002), Lealem and Mahlet (2014).

5) Hərüy Wäldä-Səlasse (1878-1938) rose from humble origins to become one of the most powerful figures of pre-1936 Ethiopia. Born in a Šāwan Amhara family, he received church education until his father's death forced him to seek paid employment. He served as a clerk for provincial governors, later continuing his education at the Raguel School. He kept working as a government functionary, learning English and French, and steadily ascending through the government hierarchy. Starting as director-general and later mayor (1919-21) of the municipality of Addis Abāba, he became director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1927, and was Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1931 to 1936. He travelled abroad extensively, including accompanying Täfäri in his 1924 European tour and visiting Japan in 1931. He accompanied Haylä Səlasse in exile in 1936 and died in England in 1938. Hərüy was an incredibly prolific writer both of fiction and non-fiction; he has to his name over 20 books and booklets including historiographical works, travelogues, fiction and a biographical dictionary. Among his historiographical works, the most significant are *YäHəywät Tarik* ('Biographies', 1922/23), *Mahdärä Bərhan Həgär Japan* ('The place of light: the country of Japan', 1931/32), and *YäItiopya Tarik* ('History of Ethiopia' 1935/36). His most important literary works are *Wādaje Ləbbe* ('My heart is my friend' 1922/23), an allegory inspired by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress* (which was translated in Amharic in 1884); *YäLəbb Assab: YäBərhanenna YäŞəyon Mogäsa Gabəčča* ('Thought of the heart: the marriage of Bərhan and Şəyon Mogäsa', 1922/23), where the marriage of the two protagonists gives the author a chance to argue against child marriage and in favour of women education and modern medicine; and *Addis Alām* ('New world', 1931/32), where the main character, Awwäkä, comes back from his studies in France with new ideas, and tries to implement them in his community.

More information on Hərüy Wäldä-Səlasse: Moreno (1933), Fusella (1943, 1984-86 and 1987), Lämna (1970/71), Tedeschi (1984), Molvaer (1997a), Bahru (1996 and 2002), Meseret (2013).

6) Tayyā Gäbrä-Maryam (1860-1924) was born in Bägemdər and joined the Swedish Evangelical mission in Əmkullu, off the port of Massawa, where he stayed until 1898, with a brief interruption from 1882 to 1885, when he went back to Bägemdər, studied *kəne* and obtained the title of *aläka*. At the Swedish mission, he taught Amharic and Geez and produced a grammar manual (*Səwasəw*, 1896/97) and a dictionary. Sometime after 1898, he was introduced to Mənilək, to whom he presented a copy of *Səwasəw*. In 1905, the German mission asked Emperor Mənilək to hire an Ethiopian scholar to teach Amharic and Geez in Berlin; Mənilək chose Tayyā. Tayyā spent 3 years in Berlin as a visiting scholar, collecting, classifying and analysing Ethiopian manuscripts in collaboration with his German

colleagues. Upon his return in 1908, Mənilək decorated him for his service, granted him some land in his native area, and commissioned him to write the history of Ethiopia. Tayyā, however, soon fell foul of the local governor, who, abhorred by his evangelical religious views and jealous of the recognition he had received, publicly accused him of heterodoxy. The governor of Bāgemdər put Tayyā in chains in 1910 and sent him to Addis Abāba to be tried. The trial attracted a large crowd, and Tayyā defended himself eloquently, but it did not save him from jail. He was put under house arrest for six years until 1916. His years under Iyasu, Zāwditu and Täfäri were relatively peaceful. In 1920 he was rehabilitated and told to resume his work on the history of Ethiopia. Tayyā, however, died before being able to publish his *magnum opus*. The manuscript was only published in 1971/72, almost fifty years after Tayyā's death.

More information on Tayyā Gäbrä-Maryam: Haylu (1970/71), Alemé (1971-1972), Ezra (1998), Arén (1999), Gori (1999), Bahru (2002).

7) Gäbrä-Əgziabher Gila-Maryam (1860s-1914) was born in present-day Eritrea, and received church education in the monastery of Däbrä Bizän. When the Italians advanced from the coast in the aftermath of Emperor Yohannəs's death in 1889, Gäbrä-Əgziabher joined them as clerk and interpreter. He continued to serve the Italians after they set up their colony of Eritrea, but his allegiance was with Ethiopia. He started working for the Ethiopian cause soon after the controversy surrounding the 1895 treaty of Wuchale, and was instrumental in convincing local Tigrayan noblemen not to side with the Italians in the 1895-1896 war. After the battle of Adwa, he accompanied Italian missions to Mənilək and Ras Mäkönnən. He negotiated on behalf of the Italians, but kept secretly collaborating with Ethiopian leaders. In July 1899, the Italians discovered in his personal correspondence incriminating evidence of his dealings with Ethiopian authorities. Gäbrä-Əgziabher was summarily tried and convicted. He was incarcerated, first in Italy then in the colonial penitentiary of Nokra in Eritrea. In November 1899 he escaped from the Nokra prison with a group of about 100 other prisoners, and managed to flee across the border to Ethiopia, where he became a political adviser at the court of Mənilək. He was nevertheless unsparing in his criticism of Ethiopian leaders, for two main reasons: firstly, for not acting to liberate Eritrea from the Italian presence, and secondly, for not committing more forcefully to the modernisation of the country. His anti-Italian feelings gave rise to many discussions with Afäwärk Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, who supported the Italian cause. Because of his criticism of Mənilək's courtiers and aristocrats, he was exiled from the capital and sent to Harär, although he was later allowed to return. He spent the last years of his life in Addis Abāba, where he circulated weekly handwritten leaflets on themes of progress and patriotism, now considered important stepping stones in the history of Ethiopian journalism.

More information on Gäbrä-Əgziabher Gila-Maryam: Fusella (1983), Taddia (1988, 1990 and 1994a), Tekeste Negash (1986), Bahru (2002), Meseret (2013).

Transitional figures between first and second generation

8) **Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs (1894-1981)** was born in Šäwa from an illiterate peasant family. He went through the whole curriculum of church education, for a total of 16 years in various religious schools. In 1920/21 one of his teachers in Gondär was called to Addis to translate some books from Geez into Amharic, and he decided to bring Wäldä-Giyorgis with him. Wäldä-Giyorgis impressed both Hərüy and Täfäri, and he was hired by the government as a scribe and translator. He worked as a teacher of *ḵəne* at the Raguel School and as a proofreader for various printing presses, and became assistant editor of *Bərhanənnä Sälām* when it was founded. He wrote some patriotic publications before the Italian war, including for the *YäHaqär Fəḵər Mahbär* ('Love of the Country Association'). With the Italian invasion, he went into hiding, but someone blew his cover and he was arrested and jailed, then forced to work for Italian propaganda newspapers. He was a *wəst arbäñña* (undercover patriot) and kept communicating with the patriots via *ḵəne*-type messages. After the liberation, he became editor and director of *Bandəraččən* and of the newly-founded *Addis Zäman*, a position that he held for over twenty years. He later directed the Ethiopian Press Agency and was appointed Assistant Minister responsible for all Amharic newspapers and magazines. Haylä Səlasse always held him in high esteem and awarded him the title of *Blatten Geta*. Another distinction came in 1966, when he was named 'Father of Ethiopian Journalism' by the Minister of Information. From 1967 to 1974 he served as adviser to the Ministry of Education. Wäldä-Giyorgis travelled abroad quite a few times, but knew no foreign languages. He nevertheless recognised the importance of modern education, and sent his children to the Täfäri Mäkönnən School. He remained a devout Christian for the whole of his life, but was critical of the Orthodox Church as an institution. His devotion to Haylä Səlasse remained unwavering throughout his life. Of his 24 books, many are poems in praise of the Emperor published for coronation day or for the Emperor's birthday. Other publications were on religion and morality, discussed vices and virtues, or dealt with important events in the history of the monarchy. He was particularly proud of his treaty *Bəlsəgənnä BəGəbərənnä* ('Wealth through agriculture', 1948/49). He also published collections of riddles and word plays. His novel *Agazi*, on a student's experiences and impressions abroad while Ethiopia is under the Italian occupation, was published in instalments in *Addis Zäman* from 1946 and later printed as a book in 1968/69.

More information on Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs: Fəḵadä (1987/88), Molvaer (1997a), Meseret (2013).

9) Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw (1891-1963), was born in a noble Šäwan family. He went to church school in Däbrä Libanos, until his uncle *Ras Täsämma Nadäw* introduced him to Mənilək and Taytu. He grew up in the imperial palace, and when the Mənilək II School opened, he was sent there to study French alongside Täfäri and Əmru Haylä-Səlasse. Before the Italo-Ethiopian war, he worked as provincial governor, chief inspector of the Franco-Ethiopian railway, *käntiba* of Addis Abäba and Minister of Commerce and of the Interior. He quickly rose in the imperial hierarchy, from the title of *Ləjj* in 1916/17, to *Näggadras* in 1926 and then *Däjazmač* (and governor of Illubabor) in 1934. When the Italians invaded, he fought in the south-eastern front with his army from Illubabor, but later joined Haylä Səlasse when the Emperor decided to leave the country. During the occupation, he lived in Palestine, then joined Haylä Səlasse in Sudan, re-entered Ethiopia with the Emperor and the British army and preceded Haylä Səlasse into Addis Abäba to prepare the city for the Emperor's return. He was later Minister of the Interior (1941-43) and Prime Minister (1941-57), rising up to the title of *Ras Bitwädäd*, the highest possible rank below the Emperor. From 1957 to 1961 he was President of the Senate. His son Əndalkačäw Mäkönnən (1926-1974) also became a high-level politician in the late 1950s and 1960s. Most of his works are published together in the collection *Arrəmuññ* ('Correct me', 1954/55), including the patriotic drama *YäDäm Dəməş* ('The voice of blood', on the execution of Abuna Peṭros at the hands of the Italians), the novel *YäDəhočč Kätäma* ('City of the poor', 1954/55, on a greedy man's moral decay and death), the play *Salsawi Dawit* (on King Dawit III), and the novel *Almotkum Bəyye Alwašəm* ('I will not lie and say I did not die', on a wife who, thinking her husband is dead fighting the Italians, starts a relationship with an Italian soldier). He also wrote a historical drama praising the virtues of Empress Taytu and portraying Tewodros II as a blood-thirsty tyrant (*Taytu Bəṭul*, 1956/57).

More information on Mäkönnən Əndalkačäw: Yimer (1981), Selamawit (1994), Fellman (1996), Molvaer (1997a).

10) Yoftahe Nəguse (1892/93-1946/47) completed the first three stages of church education at Däbrä Libanos by the age of 14. He started taking on administrative duties in the Orthodox Church. In 1923/24 he was employed as an Amharic teacher at the Mənilək II School. At this time he started to write his first literary works. He was among the forerunners of modern drama in Ethiopia. In 1930/31 he staged the play *Təḫəm Yalläbbät Čäwata* ('Play containing something useful') and in 1932/33 *YäHod Amlaku Kəṭat* ('The punishment of Belly-Is-His-God'). They are among the earliest Amharic plays. He was one of the founders of the *YäHagär Fəḫər Mahbär*. During the occupation, he fled to the Sudan, where he wrote patriotic poems and poems. After the liberation, he was appointed Vice President of the Senate. The only play he published during his lifetime was *Əlkeṭru Gobäz Ayyän* ('We saw the brave man', 1935/36), which promoted patriotic sentiments in the face of the looming

fascist menace. His poems used many Geez words and drew extensively from the *ḵəne* tradition.

More information on Yoftahe Nəguse: Mulugeta Səyum (1971/72), Plastow (1996), Bahru (2002).

The second generation

11) Gərmaččäw Täklä-Hawaryat (1915-1987) was the son of Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam.

He grew up in his father's farm at Hərna, and then attended the French school in Dəre Dawa. When his father was sent to France as ambassador, Gərmaččäw followed him there and graduated in 1935 with a BA degree in theology. When Italy occupied Ethiopia he fled to Djibouti, but returned to Addis Abäba in 1937. He was arrested in the aftermath of the attempt on Graziani's life, and spent six years in prison in Italy. After the liberation, he had a high-profile political career. He became director-general of the Office for Newspapers and Information (1943-1945) and later of the Office for Europe in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1945-1949). His play on Emperor Tewodros (1957/58) was first performed in 1946/7. In 1948/49 he published his novel *Araya*, where the homonymous protagonist returns to Ethiopia from his studies in France willing to implement many reforms, but his aspirations are frustrated by his colleagues and later by the Italian invasion. He worked as Ethiopian *chargé d'affaires* in Sweden (1949/50-1954/55), Brazil (1955-1957/58), Italy (1958-1960) and West Germany (1960-1961). Back in Ethiopia, he worked as Minister throughout the 1960s, first of Information (1961-1964), subsequently of Agriculture (1965-1968), later of Health (1968-1970). In 1970 he was nominated Crown Councillor and special advisor to the Emperor. He spent 8 years in prison after the 1974 revolution, and died of cancer in 1987.

More information on Gərmaččäw Täklä-Hawaryat: Molvaer (1997a).

12) Kābbädä Mikael (1914-1998) born in Ankobär, was Catholic and fluent in three foreign languages – French, English and Italian. He first attended church school, becoming an expert of *ḵəne*. At the age of nine, he was sent to the Catholic Mission School in Addis Abäba. He also studied French at the Alliance Française. He was appointed as private tutor to Prince Mäkönnən, and was scheduled to continue his studies in France, but the project was disrupted by the Italian occupation. The Italians hired him to work at the radio. After the liberation, he worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Posts. The highest role he reached was that of director-general of the Ministry of Education (he was the de-facto Minister as Haylä Səlasse reserved for himself the honorary position of Minister of Education). He also worked as director of the National Library and founded the Addis Abäba Archaeological Museum. He was ambassador extraordinary to the Vatican at the

opening of the Second Ecumenical Council in 1962. After 1974, the Därg confiscated all of his houses, and he lived in poor conditions in cheap hotels. He wrote several history books, including *Ityopyanna Məəhrabawi Səltane/Ethiopia and Western Civilisation/L'Éthiopie et la civilisation occidentale* (1948/49), a history of Japan (*Japan əndamən salatanač*, 'How Japan modernised', 1953/54), the biographies of great men in world history (*Talallak Säwočč*, 'Big men', 1954/55), a biography of Alexander the Great (*Təlləku Əskəndər*, 'Alexander the Great', 1954/55), and a history of the world (*YəAlām Tarik*, 'World history', 1955/56). His fame is linked to his plays *YəTənbət Kəṭəro* ('Appointment with prophecy', 1945/46), *Annibal* (celebrating the Carthaginian general Hannibal, 1963/64), *Aše Kaleb* (on the Aksumite Emperor Kaleb, 1965/66), and *Akəab* (on the biblical King of Israel Ahab, 1967/68). He is also well remembered for his classic adaptations into Amharic of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (*Romewonna Žulyät*, 1953/54) and Goethe's *Faust* (*Ato Bəlaynah Wəym YəKəṭat Mabäl*, 'Ato Bəlaynah or the storm of punishment', 1958/59), for his poetry (*YəKəne Azmära*, 1963/64), and for his collection of folktales and short stories for children *Tarikənnə Məssale* ('Story and Parable', 1942/1943). For his literary accomplishments, he was awarded the Haylä Səlasse I Prize for Amharic Literature in 1964.

More information on Kəbbädä Mikael: Təsfae (1964), Selamawit (1994), Mekonnen (1995), Molvaer (1997a).

13) Haddis Aləmayəhu (1909-2003), a Gojjamé, received traditional church education (his father was an *aləka*) until he was 17 or 18 years old. In 1925/26, he followed one of his teachers to Addis Abäba where he went attended the Swedish Mission School and, two years later, was transferred to the Täfäri Mäkonnen School. There he wrote his first play, *YəHabäša Ənna YəWädəhwala Gabəčča* ('The marriage of Habäša and The-Backward-One'), one of the first plays ever to be written and performed in Ethiopia. It was written as a school performance, but staged in the Majestic Hotel in Addis Abäba. A second play, staged at the May 1932 wedding of the Crown Prince, gained him a certain public visibility, including with the newly-crowned Emperor. He then worked as a teacher, as a customs officer, and as a member of a team in charge of enforcing the anti-slavery proclamation in Gojjam. After the Italian occupation of Addis Abäba in 1936, he became a guerrilla fighter under Əmru Haylä-Səlasse, but was captured and spent seven years in Italy as a prisoner of war (1937-1944). Upon his return to Ethiopia, he immediately entered government service, first in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then embarking on a diplomatic career as consul in Jerusalem (1945), First Secretary of the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington (1947), director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1950), Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs (1952), and Ethiopian representative at the UN (1957). In the aftermath of the 1960 coup, he wrote an important memorandum where he advised the Emperor on a series of reforms, followed in 1963 by the pamphlet *Ityopya Mən Aynat Astädadär Yasfalgatal?* ('What kind of

administration for Ethiopia?’), published only after the Revolution. Nothing came of these documents, and Haddis’s subsequent appointments to ambassadorial posts away from Addis Abāba were probably the result of a growing estrangement between him and the Emperor. He later worked as Minister of Planning and Development and was a member of the National Legislature until the Revolution. His first published work was a collection of children’s stories, *Tārāt Tārāt Yāmāsārāt* (‘Tales, tales of old’, 1955/56). *Fəḳər Əskä Mäḳabər* (‘Love unto the grave’), a historical love story set in the pre-Italian occupation period, was published 10 years later (although Haddis had been working on it until the post-liberation years). It was an immediate success, and remains to date one of the most read and cherished Amharic novels. In 1969 he won the Haylä Səlassə I Prize for Amharic Literature. The rest of his literary works were published after the Revolution and did not attract much critical attention or public interest. He also published a memoir on the Italian occupation and his seven-year detention in Italy (*Təzzəta*, ‘Remembrance’, 1943).

More information on Haddis Alāmayāhu: Kapeliouk (1976), Zerihun Asfaw (1983), Tsegaye Hailu (1987), Asfaw (2000), Misrak (2002), Girma Abebe (2004), Molla (2008), Fitsum (2015).

14) Mäkönnən Dästa (1910-1966) attended the Täfäri Mäkönnən School in the 1920s. He continued his studies at the American University in Beirut, and later joined Harvard University in the US. At Harvard he studied medicine, but later switched to anthropology. He was the first university-educated Ethiopian anthropologist. He returned to Ethiopia in 1935, as a research assistant to Carleton S. Coon. When the Italians invaded Ethiopia, he escaped to Sudan, and taught mathematics at the English Mission College in Cairo. In 1941 he returned to Ethiopia and joined the patriots as a liaison officer for British support units in Gojjam. He served as Minister of Education in the first post-independence government and re-established the Ethiopian educational system previously shut down by the Italians. Afterwards he was transferred to Ministry of Post. In 1952 he served as governor of Wälläga. He was also a filmmaker and in 1956 produced a documentary film on Ethiopia for the German newsreel Deutsche Wochenschau.

More information on Mäkönnən Dästa: Zitelmann (2001).

15) Asäffa Gäbrä-Maryam (1919/20-1968) received a modern education at a Canadian missionary school at Ibsa. During the Italian occupation he worked as an interpreter for the Italians, but his collaborationism was later pardoned. After the liberation, he occupied many high-profile political positions, including Vice-Minister of the Interior, Minister of the Interior and Ethiopian ambassador to India. His only novel, *Əndäwaṭṭačč Kərračč* (‘She went out and never came back’, 1953/54), revolves around the theme of prostitution. The main character is a young woman who betrays her husband and is punished by God for her

sin. She suffers from alcoholism and tuberculosis and dies of syphilis far from her family and without friends. After years battling depression, Asäffa shot himself in 1968; he was survived by his brother Nägaš, another important figure in the intellectual environment of the 1950s and 1960s.

More information on Asäffa Gäbrä-Maryam: Molvaer (1997a).

The third generation

16) Mängəstu Lämman (1928–1988), grew up in Harar, where his father, an Orthodox priest and scholar, was appointed *aläka* of a local church. Mängəstu was educated in Geez, Bible studies, religious music and traditional poetry, and became a master at the use of *kəne*. After high school at the Haylä Səlasse I Secondary School in Addis Abäba he got a scholarship to study at the London School of Economics. He spent 7 years in London, from 1948 to 1954. He was among the founders of the Ethiopian Student Society in London, and acted as the first editor of *The Lion Cub*, the Society's newspaper. Back in Ethiopia, he worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in 1969/70 became secretary-general of the Amharic Language Academy. His two most famous plays, *Tälfo Bäkise* ('Marriage by abduction', 1968/69) and *Yalačča Gabəčča* ('Marriage of unequals', 1964/65), analyse the changes in Ethiopian society from the vantage point of marriage customs. His most famous collection of poetry was *YäGəṭəm Gubae* ('Synod of poetry', 1957/58, second edition 1964/65), followed by *Baša Ašəbər BəAmerica* ('Baša Ašəbər in America', 1974). His attachment to Ethiopian literary heritage is evident in *Yabbatočč Čəwata* ('Tales of the forefathers'), a collection of folktales and stories published in 1960/61. His father had a special place among these forefathers. Mängəstu often repeated that his father was the single most influential figure in his life, and honoured him by writing a biographical book about his father's intellectual and social trajectory, *Məšhafä Təzəta ZäAläka Lämman* ('The book of memories of *Aläka Lämman*', 1966/67), based on tape-recorded conversations with his then 95-year-old parent. Of his later production, three plays stand out. The first is *Šərrä Koloniyalist* ('Anti-colonialist', staged 1981/82, published 1982/83), a patriotic drama set during the 1936-1941 Italian occupation of Ethiopia. In *Baləkabbanna Balədabba*, ('The mighty and the lowly', staged 1975/76, published 1982/83) he condemns those foreign-educated Ethiopians that lived a luxurious life in their home country instead of becoming socially engaged in the struggle to improve it. Lastly, *Šəmmya* ('Scramble for office', staged 1985/86) is a satire of the systematic corruption and embezzlement practices of Haylä Səlasse's regime. He wrote over the theory of literature too, proposing in 1963 a first comprehensive categorisation of Amharic metrical forms, and writing a number of studies of literary theory about poetry and theatre. He was deeply dedicated to the preservation of traditional Geez heritage, and supervised the collection and publication of a series of

collections of *kəne*. He had a distinguished career as a civil servant, diplomat and professor in the Theatre Arts Department of Addis Abāba University. His autobiography was published posthumously in 1996.

More information about Māngəstu Lämma: Akalu (1981), Ricci (1969-1970), Goldenberg (1980-1981), Pankhurst (1988 and 1989), Täsfaye (1988a, 1988b and 1988c), Plastow (1996), Molvaer (1997a), Fusella (1999), Hailu (2010).

17) Daññaččāw Wārku (1936-1994) grew up in Däbrä Sina and attended a primary government school there before enrolling in the Haylä Səlasse I Secondary School, where he completed grades 8-11. After secondary school he attended a teacher training school in Addis Abāba and started teaching Amharic in secondary schools in Harär and later back in Addis. From the mid-1950s, he started contributing to newspapers (he wrote mostly reviews of books, plays and films) and started writing plays, some of which were performed at Haylä Səlasse I Theatre. In 1960 he started a 4-year BA degree at the University College of Addis Abāba, during which he was partly involved with student politics and wrote protest poems. He went on to become a lecturer at the Haylä Səlasse I University, until he got a scholarship in 1969 to study creative writing at an international writers' workshop at Iowa University, which led to a MA in Fine Arts. Back in Ethiopia in 1972, he started teaching again. He spent the following year and a half writing his masterpiece, the novel *Adäfrəs* (published in 10,000 copies). His next book, this time in English, was titled *The Thirteenth Sun*, and was accepted by Heinemann for publication in African Writers Series in 1973. He kept a low profile during the Revolution, and under the Därg he published didactic textbooks for writing fiction and for teaching the Amharic language. He worked for the government publishing press and, later, for a government consultancy until he retired in 1991. In total, he published two novels, two plays, a collection of poems, numerous short stories and a major work of literary criticism, *YäṢəhuf Təbāb Mämmäriya* ('A guide to writing skills'); he also contributed to a dictionary of Amharic geographical terms and to a dictionary of Amharic idiomatic expression.

More information on Daññaččāw Wārku: Sahle Selassie (1974), Wren (1974 and 1976), Wilt (1988), Teklu (1983), Molvaer (1997a), Taye (1994 and 2000), Zewge (2001), Misrak (2002), Tewodros (2006), Kurtz (2010).

18) Täsfaye Gässässä (b.1937) was born in Harärge; his paternal grandfather, a *fitawrari*, was one of *Ras Mäkonnen*'s army commanders, and his father grew up close to Haylä Səlasse. The family owned land, and Täsfaye always had the rent to supplement his income. He moved to Addis Abāba at seven years old to attend the Täfäri Mäkonnen School, where he completed his primary and secondary education, and where he started acting in school

plays. When he finished secondary school in 1955/56, he started attending the University College, studying General Arts for four years and majoring in law. Haylä Səlasse, impressed by one of his performances as an actor, encouraged him to study theatre, and Täsfaye spent two years (from 1959 to 1961) in the USA for a MA in Theatre Arts. He worked as producer and actor at the Haylä Səlasse I Theatre, where he was close friend and colleague of Şägaye and where over the 1960s he staged most of his plays: *Yäši* (after the play's protagonist, 1962/63), about an immoral and manipulative prostitute; *Abbatənnä Ləjjočč* ('Father and sons', 1966/67) on the conflict of generations; and *Tiyatər Sədadda* ('A hunch for theatre', 1966/67), a surrealist play in one act. In 1963 he joined the Creative Arts Centre at the university, where he worked until 1969. From 1968 to 1973 he worked as public relations officer at Ethiopian Telecommunications and at the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps his most famous play was *Əḳaw* ('The thing', 1969/1970) set in South Africa during apartheid, denouncing how totalitarianism treats people as things. He kept working in theatre after the Därg took over, as a director of the *YäHagär Fəḳər Tiyatər* and later of the National Theatre (the new name of the Haylä Səlasse I Theatre). He continued to write and stage plays, contributed to newspapers, had his own weekly radio programme on art news, published a collection of short stories and poems and taught at the university, where he became director of the Cultural Centre (the heir of the Creative Arts Centre) from 1986/87.

More information on Täsfaye Gəssässä: Plastow (1996), Molvaer (1997a).

19) Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən (1936-2006) was born near Ambo from a Mäčča Oromo father. He was privately tutored in traditional subjects before attending elementary school in Ambo (1948-1952). He continued his education at the General Wingate Secondary School in Addis and later at the Commercial Secondary School, from where he graduated in 1956. He obtained a LLB degree at the Blackstone School of Law in Chicago and in 1959/60 was awarded a UNESCO scholarship to study experimental theatre in Europe. He wrote a high number of plays, some in English (*Tewodros*, 1963; *Azmari*, 1963; *Oda Oak Oracle*, 1965; *Collision of altars*, 1977) some in Amharic (*Bälg*, 'Season of the small rains', 1959/60; *YäŠok Akilil*, 'Crown of thorns', 1965/66; *YäKarmo Säw*, 'Man of the future', 1965/66), and translated into Amharic several works by Shakespeare, Molière and Brecht. *Oda Oak Oracle*, 'one of the finest plays to have been written in Africa' according to Gérard (1971: 374), is set in a non-Christian society where Shanka tries to defy the oracle, who has prescribed that his first born is to be sacrificed to propitiate the ancestors. From 1961 to 1974 he was director, and later general manager, of the Haylä Səlasse I Theatre, and in 1966 he was awarded the Haylä Səlasse I Prize for Amharic Literature. His English-language plays gave him international recognition and were staged in Europe, Africa and the US. Within Ethiopia, his fame is also linked to his poetry (*Əsat Wäy Abäba*, 'Fire or flower',

1973/1974). He also published English-language poems on the *Ethiopia Observer* in 1965. He was a strong supporter of Pan-Africanism. He supported the Revolution, and wrote pro-revolutionary plays, but his relationship with the Därg deteriorated quickly. During the Därg period, he worked for the Ministry of Culture and Sports, as lecturer at Addis Ababa University and then as adviser in the Ministry of Culture. In 1997 he was awarded the Golden Laurel Award with the title of Honorable Poet Laureate, granted by the Congress of World Poets and United Poets Laureate International. He spent the last years of his life (from 1998 onwards) in the USA, where he relocated to receive medical treatment for his diabetes.

More information on Sägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən: Fantahun (1995), Jeyifo (1995), Molvaer (1997a), Negussay (2000), Getie & Haars (2007), Bayleyegn (2011), Fasil Yitbarek (2013).

20) Taddässä Libän (b.1930) was from a Wällo Oromo family who had relocated to Wälläga. He moved to Addis Abäbä when he was two years old, and was a student at the Adventist Mission School in Aḳaḳi, close to Addis, and subsequently at the Haylä Səlassə I Secondary School, where he graduated in 1949. His mother, an excellent storyteller, played a great influence in his literary career. Mängəstu Lämman, a classmate of Taddässä, was another important influence in Taddässä's decision to write. His first collection of short stories, *Mäskäräm* (the first month of the year in the Ethiopian calendar) was published 1956/7 and followed by *Lelaw Mängäd* ('The other way') in 1959/60. Both collections were printed in 5,000 copies each, and sold very well, but then Taddässä stopped writing, despite the encouragement of his friends. He taught for two years in a private Muslim school and in 1951 joined the State Bank of Ethiopia. His whole subsequent career was in banking, both before and after 1974 revolution.

More information on Taddässä Libän: Comba (1959), Molvaer (1997).

21) Bərhanu Zärihun (1933/4-1987) was born in Gondär in a very religious Orthodox family. He received church education from six to twelve years old. He fought hard to convince his parents to let him join a government school, which he eventually attended in Gondär. He moved to Addis in 1952/53 to attend the Addis Ababa Technical School, and started contributing to national newspapers. He graduated in 1955/56 and in 1959/60 he was offered a job as senior reporter for the Ministry of Information, rising to become editor-in-chief of *YäZarayətu Ityopyä* ('Today's Ethiopia') and *Addis Zämən* ('New era') from 1960/61 to 1966/67. He published six novels between 1959/60 and 1966/67, of which one (*Dəl KäMot Bähwala*, 'Victory after death', 1962/63) was inspired by the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, two (*Hulätt YäƏnba Däbdabbewočč* 'Two letters of tears' 1959/60, and *YäBädäl Fəşşame*, 'The fulfilment of the crime', 1964/65) treated the theme

of prostitution, and one (*YäTewodros Ənba*, 'Tewodros's tear', 1964/65) celebrated Emperor Tewodros II. In journalism, pressures to print only what the government dictated were high, and Bərhanu, who resented the lack of editorial freedom, entered into conflict with his superiors, which resulted in his firing in 1966/67. For the following eight years, he kept his salary but was unemployed; he lost inspiration and motivation, and his literary career stalled as well. After years of inactivity, he was profoundly shocked by the famine of 1973/74; he visited some of the affected areas and started taking notes, which would later evolve in his post-revolutionary trilogy, *Maəbäl*, the work for which he is most often remembered. After the Revolution, he was reinstated as editor of *Addis Zämän*, and continued writing novels and plays (some of which were produced by Täsfae Gässässä).

More information on Bərhanu Zärihun: Taye (1989a), Molvaer (1997a).

22) Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam (b.1936) belonged to the Čača clan of the Gurage people, and Gurage was his mother tongue. He was raised a Catholic and started learning English, French and, for the first time, Amharic at primary school. His teachers later transferred him to Addis, where he attended the Täfäri Mäkönnən School from grade 4 to grade 12. From 1955 to 1959 he completed a BA degree at the University College, and was particularly fond of philosophy, political science and English literature. After his BA, he found a scholarship to study law in France, but did not like the discipline and did not do very well. In France, he worked as language informant for Wolf Leslau, who was studying the Gurage language and managed to find him a scholarship to the USA. Sahlä-Səlasse completed a MA degree in Political Science at UCLA. Leslau encouraged him to write a literary piece in Gurage, and the novel *Ye-Shinega Qaya* (promptly translated in English by Leslau as 'Shinega's Village', 1964) set Sahlä-Səlasse off a literary career. Back in Ethiopia in 1963, he tried his hand at an Amharic-language novel (*Wäṭṭat Yəfrädäw*, 'Let youth judge', 1966/67), but was unsatisfied with the level of Amharic and frustrated at the changes requested by the censors. To circumvent censorship, he published his next novel in English with Heinemann as part of the African Writers Series (*The Afersata*, 1969). The novel describes the institution of the *afersata*, a village assembly summoned to investigate crimes. His second English-language novel, *Warrior King* (1974), about Tewodros's rise to power, was also published by Heinemann. After a decade working for various government companies, in 1974 he joined the British Embassy as a translator. He continued to write both in English and in Amharic, and particularly committed to Amharic after debating with Mängəstu Lämmä over linguistic policies in literature. The Amharic novel *Baša Keṭaw*, dealing with the Italian occupation, was blocked several times by the censors, thus confirming Sahlä-Səlasse's earlier disillusionment with publishing in Amharic. It was eventually published in 1973. *Firebrands*, a novel on the three years preceding and one year

following the Revolution, came out for Longman in 1979; it sold well abroad but was banned in Ethiopia.

More information on Sahlä-Səlasse Bərhanä-Maryam: Fekade (1979), Taddesse Adera (1996), Molvaer (1997a).

23) Abbe Gubäñña (1933-1980), born near Bahər Dar, went to church school for twelve years, where he learnt Geez and *kəne*, and then completed grades 1-8 in a government school in Dangla. He graduated from secondary school in Addis, but never went to university; he was employed by the government instead, first as a journalist in the Ministry of Information, and later in the Ministry of Health. He resigned from government service, trying to live off the money he earned via the sale of his novels. He became a prolific and versatile writer, and published 21 books in Amharic and 2 in English between 1956 and 1977. Eight are novels, five are plays, three are collections of poetry and the others have miscellaneous content from literary theory to biographies of famous historical figures. The books generally sold well, and Abbe became very popular, but the earnings were not enough. He made debts that he was never able to settle, and when he died he owed the printers a lot of money. His most famous work, *Alwällädəm* ('I will not/refuse to be born', 1962/63) is about a child who, speaking from his mother's womb, refuses to be born in a world full of suffering and injustice. In *Məlkəam Säyfä Nəbälbal* ('Məlkəam [proper noun] Sword-of-Flame', 1963/64), a bestseller whose 25,000 copies were sold in a short time, he advocated a transition to a constitutional monarchy. *Defiance*, the story of a family during the Italian occupation, was published by Oxford University Press in 1975. His verse-drama *YäPatris Lumumba Asazzañ Amwamwat* ('The saddening death of Patrice Lumumba', 1961/62) is one of the earliest Amharic plays inspired by Pan-Africanism. His books often denounced oppression and exploitation, and caused him problems with the authorities. *Alwällädəm* was banned and its copies collected and burnt after only 800 copies of the novel were sold. Under Haylä Səlasse, Abbe spent five years and a half in prison and internal exile in Gore, Illubabor and Močča. His political positions and clashes with the imperial authorities were perhaps the main factor which contributed to his fame, which some literary critics suggested was overrated. He was highly supportive of the Revolution, but later grew disappointed, lost his creative urge and took to drinking. He died in a pub brawl in 1980.

More information on Abbe Gubäñña: Asfaw Damte (1981/82), Taddese Alemu (1992), Tesfaye Dagnew (1986), Singh (1989), Girmai Negash (1995).

24) Nägaš Gäbrä-Maryam (b. 1925) was born in Haräрге and grew up with his older brother Asäffa. His schooling was a mix of church education and modern education. After the Italian occupation, he moved with Asäffa to Addis Abäba, where he briefly attended the

Täfäri Mäkönnən School and, later, a teacher training school affiliated to the British Council. After one year working as a teacher in Jəmma, he joined the Haylä Səlasse I Secondary School for three years, after which he was admitted to the University College. He continued his higher education abroad, with two years studying journalism at Montana State University (1955-1957), and two further years at Syracuse University (1957-1959). Back in Ethiopia, he started a career in journalism. He worked for the *Ethiopian Herald* and was later appointed editor of *Addis Zämän*, replacing Wäldä-Giyorgis Wäldä-Yohannəs, who was promoted to the position of adviser. He also worked as radio manager and programme director. *Setäñña Adari* ('Prostitute'), his only novel was published in 1963/64 under the pseudonym Ənanu Agonafər. The novel is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, a prostitute, in an ironic, lively and often explicit Amharic. In 1972, he wrote a play called *YäDəll Aṭbiya Arbäñña* ('The patriot of the dawn of victory' or 'The last-minute patriot') about those who joined the armed resistance against the Italians only when the Ethiopian victory was imminent. He ended his journalistic career in 1975, after serving as general manager of the Ethiopian News Agency for seven months. Then, against his will, he was transferred to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development as head of the public relations department. Around 1977/78 the government asked him to retire. Nägaš had more time for his literary interests, and wrote three other plays. His second play, a comedy, was performed at the National Theatre, and proved very popular. The third and fourth were not approved by the censors, and it is unclear whether they were eventually performed.

For more information on Nägaš Gäbrä-Maryam: Molvaer (1997a), Meseret (2013).

25) Gärmame Nəway (1924-1960) belonged, through his mother, to the Šəwan nobility. His elder brother, Mängəstu (b. 1919-1961) was the commander of the Imperial Body Guard (1955-1960). Gärmame received primary education at the Täfäri Mäkönnən School, and later joined the Haylä-Səlasse I Secondary School. The Crown Prince Asfa Wəsən sponsored his higher education in the United States, where he earned his BA from the University of Wisconsin (Madison) and his MA from Columbia University. His MA thesis was on white settlement policy in Kenya. After his return in Ethiopia, he repeatedly tried to organise his fellow intellectuals with a view to introducing administrative reforms. The government, worried by his radical views and his activism in Addis Abäba, appointed him governor of the peripheral areas of Wälaytta and then Jijiga. Gärmame distinguished himself as an excellent administrator in both cases. He is generally believed to have been the mind behind the 1960 coup d'état, led by his brother Mängəstu. After the coup failed, the two brothers managed to escape, but were discovered few weeks later at their hideout not far from the capital. Gärmame died in the ensuing shootout, Mängəstu was captured, tried and hanged in 1961.

More information on Gärname Nəway: Greenfield (1965), Clapham (1968), Tekeste Melake (1990 and 1994), Bahru (1994).

Appendix 2 – Şägaye Gäbrä-Mädhən's 'Also of Etiopics' (1965)

We, the wonder plants of cinema screens
Generation of car-hooters and time-hooted
Children of past ruins and present insecurities
We, of hollow-hearts and jazz-minds
Mockeries who seem to know what we don't care for
And giants who do not know where to step
We, the intellectual brain disease cases
The gogmagogs waiting to scratch
Each other's eyes out
We, who eat your days smothering others' systems
And our evenings smothering our own
We, who on hearing lamenting church chants
Experience a belly-ache right through our spinal systems
We, the smart smiling sons of smarter sad fathers
We, the odd misfits among your own folk
Who aimlessly drift from day to day
We, with heads as fat as ant soldiers
With pocketed hands that refuse
To touch the earth our mothers bent to till:
We are to know.
Condemned to know.

We are to know
Of the fears that undermined the patriot's sleep
Of the belly that rules the will of the underfed
Of the seeds that toss within the womb of the black soil
Of the chill that peels the labourer's bare skin.
We are to know
We who cry
'What of the days of historic showdowns?'
Of the marvel walls of Lalibela
Of the tours of Queen Sheba
Of King Kaleb and his will of iron
Of the wonders of the Aksumites
Of Tewodros and his shortlived, fast fallen lightening
Of Alula and his military art

Of Habtegeorgis and his army of faith
Of Menelik and his rare wisdom:
We are to know.

We who think
That these living monuments of 'decadence' archaism
Are fit only in a national museum
Only for the benefit of the ethnological research student
(As mines of invaluable human study)
Yet to be claimed only by the angle of death:
We who dream
Of sacred words that flutter in dark hopes
Of the codes that are hardly whispered:
We who declare that in the past
Whatever was of sacred was of taboo
Whatever was of Truth was of tin-gods:
We who think you can shout 'Murder!'
Shout 'Stop thief'
Cry 'Hell'
And get away with it:
We are to know.
Condemned to know.

We are to know
Of the days when from the village dirty ponds
The ugly frogs sang their last days of winter
Of the days when we tottered and paddled on our fours
While our little legs were yet playing us false
Of the songs of the past our elders taught us
The songs when time was of little or of no concerns
When these giant mountains swallowed in
The deaf pride of antiquity
And frowned away at the winds of change:
Of the proud peasant fathers
Who stood aloof and forbearing
While the living daylights were milked out of them
By the petty chiefs, priests, clerks and demagogues:
We are to know.

Condemned to know.

We whose fathers inherited centuries of yoke
Fought and bled in centuries of battles
We, how to-day roll and scream
Rise and fall on the soil of ages
We, whose wake is rooted
In the moaning groins of yesteryears
In the obsessive mist of past ballads
We, the strange fruits of present chaos
Whose dreams are occupied
In tales of historical etopics
We, who like an abandoned ship
Drift in the angry waves of time
We who cry 'who am I mother!'
We are to know.
Condemned to know.

Figures



FIG. 3.6. TIGREAN CIRCLE MAP AND WIND ROSE COLLECTED BY ANTOINE THOMAS D'ABBADIE. Paper and ink from the Kebrä Nägäst. The cardinal and intermediate directions are shown in both maps. The sacred city of Aksum lies in the middle of the top map, and the names of the outlying provinces make up the outer circle. Size of the original: 22.3×14 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale du France, Paris, Collection Antoine d'Abbadie, 1859 (no. 225, fol. 3).

Figure 1 (Source: Bassett 1998: 29)

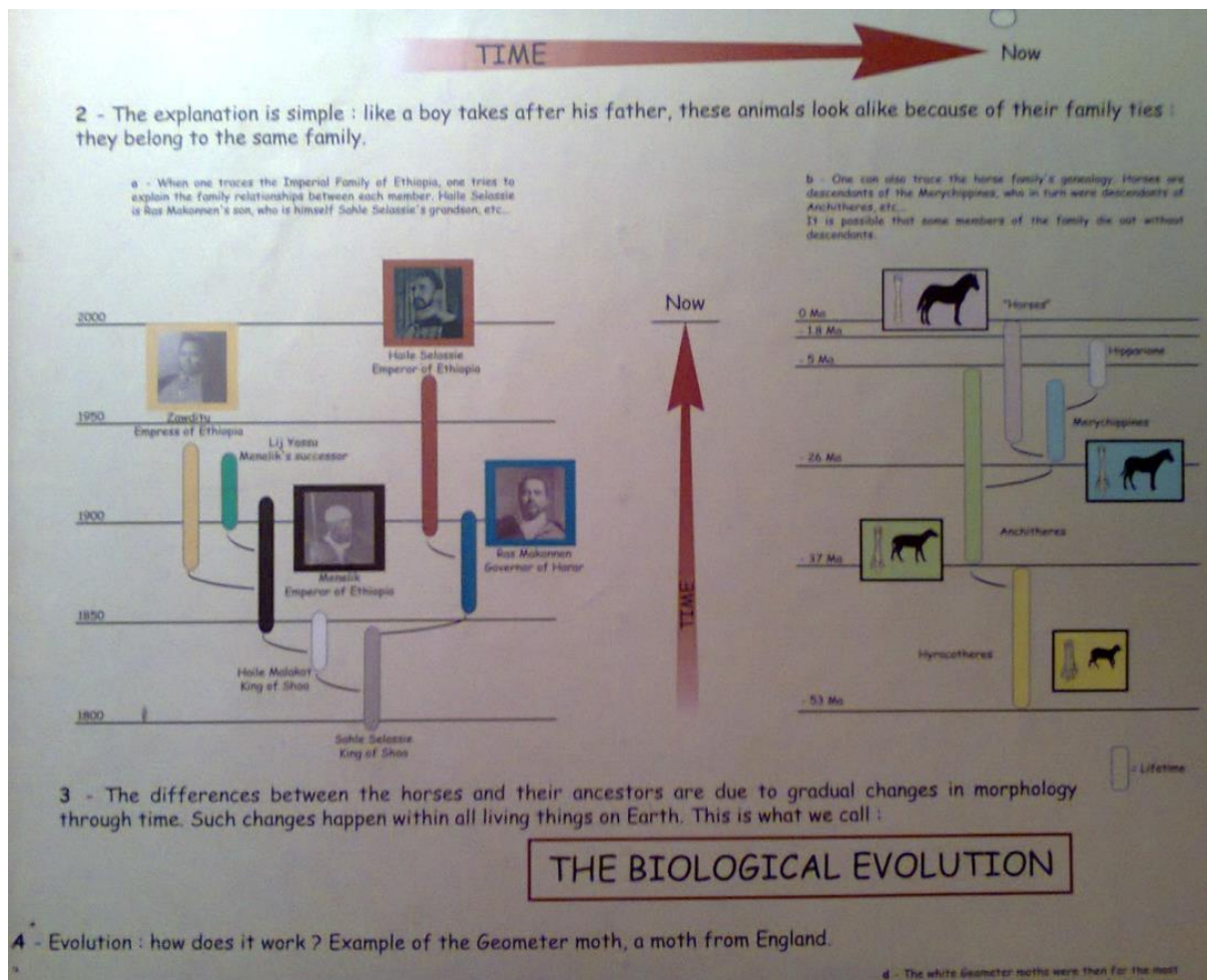


Figure 2



Figure 3

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[Ethiopian authors are listed by first name followed by their father's name. In some Ethiopian editions, the publisher's name is not indicated and has not been listed. In the in-text references, 'Bahru' refers to Bahru Zewde and 'Pankhurst' to Richard Pankhurst. In keeping with the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, in the reference list the symbol *ä* has been listed under *a*, and *ə* under *e*].

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²⁵³ For a discussion on how to translate the word *əlķetru* see Kane (1975: 12).

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